

The GUADALCANAL



CAMPAIGN



LUNGA POINT AS IT WAS IN THE BEGINNING—Large cleared space in center foreground is the site at which first Japanese, then U. S. Marines, labored to maintain Henderson Field

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HISTORICAL DIVISION,
HEADQUARTERS MARINE CORPS
PLEASE RETURN TO ROOM *3129*



THE GUADALCANAL CAMPAIGN



Major John L. Zimmerman, USMCR

HISTORICAL DIVISION
HEADQUARTERS
U. S. MARINE CORPS

1949



THE GUADALCANAL
CAMPAIGN

Foreword

As one who participated in the long-drawn campaign of Guadalcanal, I cannot find more appropriate words to characterize that operation than those of my predecessor, General Vandegrift, in his special prefatory note.

To him, as to many thousands of other U. S. Marines, living and dead, our nation and our Corps owe gratitude for the readiness, discipline, and esprit which enabled the Fleet Marine Force to launch and win America's first offensive in World War II.

C. B. CATES,
GENERAL, U. S. MARINE CORPS,
COMMANDANT OF THE MARINE CORPS.



THE GUADALCANAL CAMPAIGN

Preface

THE GUADALCANAL CAMPAIGN, a monograph prepared by the Historical Division, Headquarters, United States Marine Corps, is the fifth of a series of operational monographs designed to present to both the student and the casual reader complete and factually accurate narratives of the major operations in which the Marine Corps participated during World War II. As a sufficient number of monographs are brought to completion, these in turn will be edited and condensed into a single operational history of the Marine Corps in World War II.

The preparation of this monograph has been attended by certain problems of a special nature. The campaign was the first great offensive of the war, and it was begun in the greatest urgency. The units engaged were not as fully indoctrinated with the necessity for submitting full and complete reports as were the participants in later operations. The art of combat photography, later developed to such magnificent degree, was as yet in its infancy. The hectic nature of the first few weeks on Guadalcanal was such as to make difficult, if not impossible, anything that was not closely and unmistakably connected with the business at hand—fighting.

Full assistance and cooperation have been given by all of whom they were requested. Individuals and various Government agencies have lent their aid whenever they were asked for it. The Office of Naval History, Naval Records and Library, and the various activities of the Army Historical Division must be mentioned as having been particularly kind and helpful. Similar acknowledgment must be made to the Marine Corps Schools for cartographic assistance, and to the Photographic Section, Headquarters, U. S. Marine Corps, for help with pictorial matter. Photographs are U. S. Marine Corps, Navy, or Army official. Lieutenant Colonel Robert D. Heinl, Jr. of the Historical Division, participated extensively in the final editing of this work and supervised its cartographic planning. Captain Samuel E. Morison, USNR, and Commander James Shaw, his assistant, made many valuable suggestions and supplied much helpful material, while Mr. Walton L. Robinson was generous with the invaluable information he has collected concerning the Japanese naval order of battle. Mr. Robert Sherrod, historian of Marine air operations, rendered generous help in many phases, as did Captain Edna L. Smith, USMCR, his assistant.

Finally, thanks must be given those officers and men who, having participated in the actions described, willingly and helpfully gave of their store of knowledge for the sake of allowing an accurate narrative to be written. In all cases their assistance has been invaluable, and in all cases it was cheerfully given.

JOHN T. SELDEN,
BRIGADIER GENERAL, U. S. MARINE CORPS,
DIRECTOR OF MARINE CORPS HISTORY.



HEADQUARTERS U. S. MARINE CORPS
WASHINGTON

December 5, 1947

We struck at Guadalcanal to halt the advance of the Japanese. We did not know how strong he was, nor did we know his plans. We knew only that he was moving down the island chain and that he had to be stopped.

We were as well trained and as well armed as time and our peacetime experience allowed us to be. We needed combat to tell us how effective our training, our doctrines, and our weapons had been.

We tested them against the enemy, and we found that they worked. From that moment in 1942, the tide turned, and the Japanese never again advanced.

A. C. Vandegriff
General U. S. Marine Corps



THE GUADALCANAL CAMPAIGN

CHAPTER I

Prelude to the Offensive

THE GUADALCANAL CAMPAIGN, the first amphibious offensive operation to be launched by the United States in World War II, was undertaken by the United States Navy and Marine Corps in August, 1942, just eight months after the Japanese had struck their initial blow at Pearl Harbor. The objective of this campaign, which was set in motion on short notice with the most limited means, was the initial step in a program designed to safeguard our imperiled lines of communication to Australia and New Zealand, which were in turn vital to the success of future operations projected in the South and Southwest Pacific theaters.¹

THE ADVANCE OF THE JAPANESE

Commencing with the advantages conferred upon them by surprise, the initiative, and carefully laid plans, the Japanese swept through East Asia, the Indies, and much of Melanesia during the first six months of 1942. The milestones of their advance were Wake, Guam, Singapore, Bataan-Corregidor, and all the Netherlands East Indies. With the southward sweep of their seemingly irresistible advance, they seized first Rabaul, on 23 January 1942, and then Bougainville, in the Northern Solomons, two months later. In Rabaul they secured a prize of great strategic worth, for it served not only as a bastion for the great central position at Truk, but also as a point of departure for further offensives

to the south.² Bougainville, together with other subsidiary positions down the chain of the Solomons, was intended to be a key outwork to Rabaul and an intermediate station in their relentless thrust toward the all-important, slender U. S. line of supply and communications from the Hawaiian Islands to Australia and New Zealand.

At the tip-end of the enemy's line down the Solomons lay the British port of Tulagi and the then little-known island of Guadalcanal.³

Having meanwhile secured, unresisted, positions at Lae, Salamaua, and Finschafen on the northern coast of New Guinea, as well as stepping-stones at Choiseul, Vella Lavella, and the Treasury Islands, the Japanese seized Tulagi, with its superb harbor, on 4 May 1942.⁴

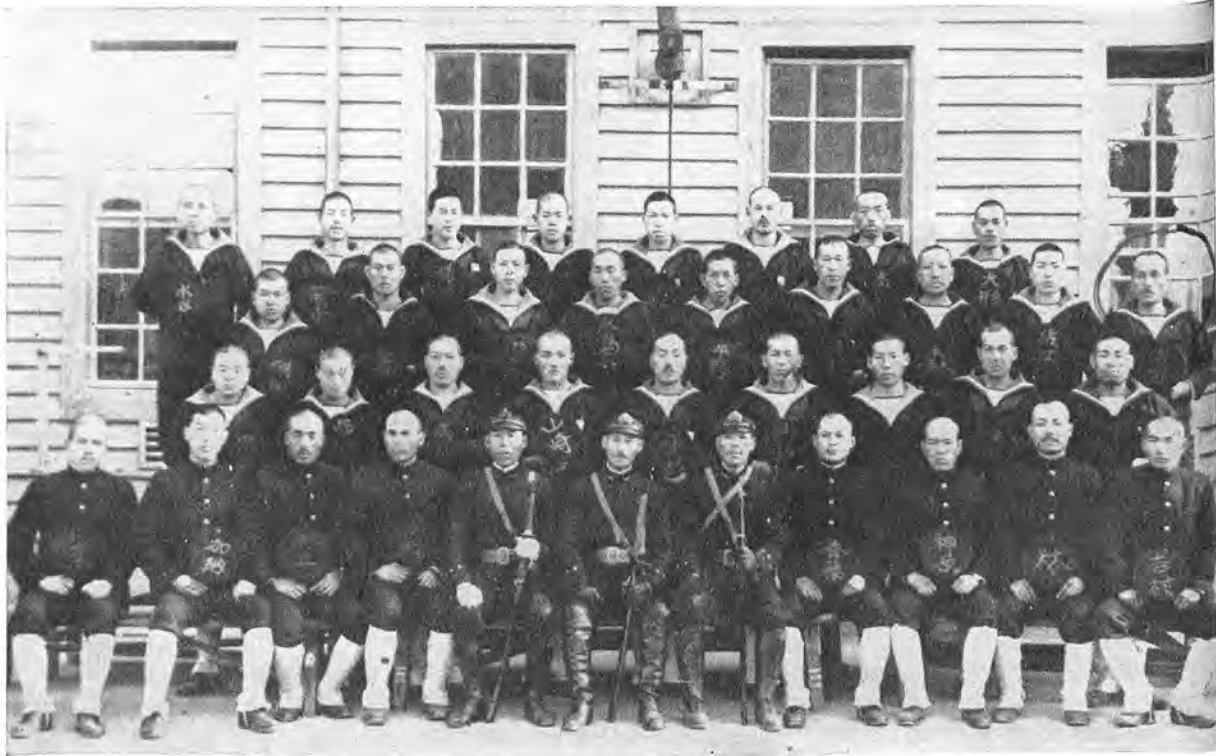
At this time, the British-Australian garrison at Tulagi consisted merely of a few riflemen of the Australian Imperial Force, some members of the Royal Australian Air Force,

² "The Japanese Threat to Australia." Samuel Milner. In *Military Affairs*, Volume XXIX, number 1, April 1948. The author says further, "Rabaul, in short, was the key to Japanese offensive action in the South and Southwest Pacific."

³ Perhaps the only group of Americans who had ever heard of the island was that which comprised the readers and admirers of Jack London. One of his better short stories, *The Red One*, had the island as its setting, under the older form of the name — Guadalcanar.

⁴ Earl Jellicoe, the famous British Admiral who commanded at Jutland, had recommended after a visit of inspection immediately after World War I, that the Tulagi Harbor be developed as a major fleet base for the defense of the Empire.

¹ JCS Directive 2 July 1942.



MEN WHO TOOK TULAGI—for the first time. Officers and petty officers of the 3d Kure Special Naval Landing Force which seized Tulagi and Gavutu in May 1942. The majority of these Japanese subsequently died defending their capture against U.S. Marines.

a member of the Australian Naval Intelligence, the Resident Commissioner for the area, the civil staff, and a few planters and missionaries. All nonessential civilians had been evacuated. Among those who remained, however, were the coastwatchers, experienced and courageous men who had in most cases spent their lives in this area, and who now were prepared to retire into the bush, where, with secret radio-transmitters, they could observe and report the Japanese movements, whether by land, sea, or air.

The Japanese descent on Tulagi was preceded by a heavy air raid on 1 May. The next day, a coastwatcher on Santa Isabel Island reported two enemy ships in Thousand Islands Bay, and it was thereupon decided to evacuate the area completely.⁵

The British Resident Commissioner and the

⁵ *The Coastwatchers*. Commander Eric A. Feldt, O.B.E., R.A.N. pp. 78 and 79.

Anglican bishop (The Right Reverend Walter Hubert Baddeley) removed to Malaita; other designated civilians proceeded to Savo and Guadalcanal to establish coastwatching stations. The military and naval personnel, with a few civilians, crossed to nearby Florida and thence to the southern tip of Guadalcanal and out of the area. The Reverend Henry De Klerk, Society of Mary, remained at his post, the mission at Tangarare, on the southern coast of Guadalcanal, and other priests and nuns of the same missionary order likewise refused to leave their posts.

The enemy landing was accomplished by a force from the 3d Kure Special Landing Force from the cruiser-minelayer *Okino-shima*, which flew the flag of Rear Admiral Kiyohide Shima. The force consisted of a machine gun company, two anti-tank gun platoons, and a number of laborers, all divided in two groups. That which landed on Tulagi was commanded by Lieutenant Juntaro

Maruyama, while the Gavulu detachment was led by Lieutenant (j.g.) Kakichi Yoshimoto.⁶

The enemy force went ashore without opposition and in accordance with plans based on aerial reconnaissance. Defensive positions were set up immediately. Base construction and improvement of existing facilities were initiated. Coastwatcher stations were established at Savo Island; and at Taivu, Marau Sound (on the southeastern tip), Cape Hunter (on the south coast near Tangarare), and Cape Esperance, all on Guadalcanal. This activity was under the personal supervision of Lieutenant Yoshimoto.⁷

No immediate steps were taken by the

enemy to develop air fields, although the plains on Guadalcanal, 17 miles away to the southward, offered excellent terrain for the purpose. All initial effort was bent toward establishing harbor facilities and a seaplane base at Tulagi, and toward developing the coastwatcher system mentioned above. A full month passed before surveying parties and patrols were put ashore near the mouth of the Lunga River. Late in June the survey was completed, and early in July construction work was undertaken in earnest on the airstrip.

The only check received by the enemy to their almost machine-like occupation of Tulagi came on the very day of their landing.⁸ United States Navy carrier aircraft, operating from *Yorktown*, of Task Force 17 (Rear Admiral Frank Jack Fletcher, USN) caught the enemy amphibious shipping concentrated in Tulagi Harbor and attacked, sinking the destroyer *Kikutsuki* and several smaller craft, and damaging another destroyer, *Yuzuki*, and the cruiser-minelayer, *Okinoshima*.⁹ (*Okinoshima* was sunk one week later

⁶ *Enemy Operations on Guadalcanal August 7, 1942 to February 9, 1943*. Prepared by Captain John A. Burden, USA (MC) and disseminated through the Office of the Assistant Chief of Staff, Headquarters Western Defense Command and Fourth Army, Presidio, San Francisco, on 23 June 1943, p. 1. The same information, with more elaborate detail is found in an untitled manuscript by Captain Eugene Boardman, USMCR, who was the Language Officer attached to the 2d Marines (see below). Manuscript in possession of author, referred to hereinafter as *Boardman ms.*

⁷ *The Boardman ms.*

⁸ *The Coastwatchers*, pp. 81 and 82.

⁹ *Enemy Operation on Guadalcanal*, p. 1.



THE JAPANESE COMMENCED AN AIRSTRIP on Guadalcanal early in July. Between the jungle (left) and coconut groves (right) of Lunga Point extended the almost completed airfield which was to be renamed Henderson. Note Mt. Austen rising against center skyline.

north of the Solomons, on 11 May, by the American submarine S 42.)¹⁰ A number of seaplanes likewise were destroyed by Fletcher's strike, and shore installations received heavy damage.¹¹

Short of this local check, and of that received a few days later at the battle of the Coral Sea, which will be discussed briefly at a later point, the enemy was undisputed in possession of the Solomon Islands as far south as Guadalcanal. From this base it would be possible to strike at Northern Australia, New Guinea, and the New Hebrides; it would likewise be possible to protect the until now wide open left flank of forces operating against Northern New Guinea and the United States' lines of air and surface communication with New Caledonia and the Antipodes.¹²

U. S. COUNTERMEASURES

Shortly after the fall of Rabaul, when it became obvious that the enemy intended an expansion to the southeast from the newly conquered Southeast Asia area, plans to contain his advance began to be formulated. On 18 February, Admiral Ernest J. King, Commander in Chief, U. S. Fleet, wrote the Chief of Staff, U. S. Army, saying that he considered it necessary to occupy certain islands in the South and Southwest Pacific. For this purpose it would be necessary to have Army troops for garrison, and King requested Marshall's approval.¹³

In reply, General Marshall wanted to know why King considered such a course necessary, and asked whether he had thought of using Marines for the garrison task. He asked to be told what King's complete plans were, and closed by saying:

¹⁰ *Japanese Naval and Merchant Shipping losses During World War II by All Causes*. Prepared by the Joint Army Navy Assessment Committee, February, 1947. (Navexos P-468) (Hereinafter referred to as JANAC). p. 2.

¹¹ *Boardman ms.*

¹² ASAFJSPA Report, p. 1.

¹³ Letter, CominCh to CofS, U. S. Army, 18 February 1942. Naval Records and Library. (Hereinafter NRL.)

In general, it would seem to appear that our effort in the Southwest Pacific must for several reasons be limited to the strategic defensive for air and ground troops.¹⁴

In reply, King was more specific. He stated flatly that bases must be established at Tonga and Espiritu Santo, and challenged the statement of policy contained in Marshall's letter by saying that the general scheme for the Pacific must be not only to protect the lines of communication but also to set up strong points whence offensives could be mounted against the enemy in the Solomon Islands area and in the Bismarck Archipelago. In stressing the need for an early offensive, he laid down certain principles which he considered indispensable.

In staging operations of the type which he envisaged, the amphibious forces involved must be replaced at once by garrison troops, in order that they might prepare for further operations. Instead of serving as garrison troops, Marines would best be employed in amphibious assaults and other advanced work.¹⁵

Occupation of certain strategically important islands began on 12 March. On that day Noumea, the capital of New Caledonia, was entered by a mixed force of U. S. Navy and Army, and the construction of a major air base at nearby Tontouta was immediately set afoot. On 29 March the 4th Defense Battalion (reinforced), Fleet Marine Force, landed at Port Vila, on the island of Efate, in the New Hebrides, to the north of New Caledonia, and less than two months later the island of Espiritu Santo was occupied and organized for defense by a combined force of Marines (from the 4th Defense Battalion and Marine Air Group 21), Naval Construction units, and Army personnel. At each of the latter two locations, naval and air base construction was begun with the maximum speed consistent with the slender means at hand.

While these initial counter-deployments of U. S. forces were in progress, the Japanese

¹⁴ Letter, Marshall to King, 24 February 1942. NRL.

¹⁵ Letter, King to Marshall, 2 March 1942. NRL.

had clashed with elements of the U. S. Pacific Fleet in the Battle of the Coral Sea, which took place on 7-8 May 1942, almost contemporaneously with the occupation of Tulagi. In this engagement, although it can hardly be said that a decisive U. S. victory had been gained, the enemy at least sustained a considerable check, losing a light carrier, the *Shoho*, together with 80 planes, and suffering severe damage to the big fleet carrier *Shokaku*.¹⁶ Moreover, a projected enemy invasion of South Papua was forestalled.

The United States forces in turn lost the USS *Lexington*, one of the familiar and much-loved aircraft carriers of the prewar Fleet. More important, however, than the actual losses of either side, was the fact that this engagement forced the Japanese to postpone tentatively until July of 1942, as they now planned—the seaborne invasion of Port Moresby, on the south coast of New Guinea.¹⁷

Concurrently with these developments, Admiral King's plans for operations in the South Pacific began to be implemented. On 10 April he warned General Holcomb that the 1st Marine Division, currently attached to the Amphibious Force, Atlantic Fleet, would be sent to the South Pacific in May, probably to Wellington, N. Z.¹⁸ In reply, General Holcomb requested that the division be transferred to the Marine Corps prior to detachment for duty overseas.¹⁹

Two events of early June gave point and immediacy to what, up to the time, had been tentative planning. American air reconnaissance, confirming reports from coastwatchers stationed nearby, had observed that the Japanese were planning an air field on the Lunga Plains. This made it clear to Admiral King at least that the time had come to carry out

that portion of Joint Chiefs of Staff's decision of 14 March which dealt with applying pressure to the enemy and containing him where possible.

At the time, another event far distant from the Southern Solomons brought about a decisive turn of circumstances in favor of the United States.

On 4 and 5 June, 1942, some 150 miles northwest of Midway Atoll, the combined attacks of carrier- and shore-based Navy and Marine air virtually annihilated the carrier-based air power of the Japanese Combined Fleet. Four enemy carriers—*Kaga*, *Akagi*, *Soryu*, and *Hiryu*—were sunk, as well as the heavy cruiser *Mikuma*, and with them went the flower of the Japanese Navy's carrier groups. More than 250 enemy aircraft had been destroyed, and, what was worse, the trained pilots, the teamwork, and the organization which go into the highly coordinated operations of a carrier air group, had likewise been wiped out. For the time being, the Japanese Navy was as much off balance—perhaps even more so—than the United States Pacific Fleet after Pearl Harbor.²⁰

The advantage accruing to the United States forces in the Pacific as a result of the decisive victory did not escape the attention of the astute MacArthur. On 9 June Nimitz noted that the General suggested an immediate assault upon Rabaul, by now Headquarters of the enemy 8th Base Force. MacArthur said that, if he were given a division of troops well trained in amphibious assault techniques, and naval support to include two carriers, he would undertake the task himself.²¹ The sug-

¹⁶ For details of Marine Corps participation in the Battle of Midway, refer to *Marines at Midway*, by LtCol Robert D. Heintz, Jr., official Marine Corps account of that action.

¹⁷ *War Diary*, CinCPac, June, 1942. NRL. MacArthur was not the only commander in the Pacific who was in favor of immediate action. A fortnight before, Nimitz had written, on 28 May, to the General suggesting a raid on Tulagi by the 1st Raider Battalion, a Marine Corps unit. MacArthur advised against the scheme on the basis of insufficient force, and Ghormley concurred. The idea was dropped. Actually, six battalions, including the same 1st Raiders, were employed in reducing the position.

¹⁸ *The Campaigns of the Pacific War*. United States Strategic Bombing Survey (Pacific), 1946. (Hereinafter referred to as USSBS.) pp. 52 and 53.

¹⁹ 1947 Memorandum by Brigadier General William E. Riley, giving certain information he gleaned while serving on staff of Admiral E. J. King, U.S.N., in 1942, hereinafter cited as *Riley Memo*.

²⁰ Memo, CominCh and CNO to Commandant Marine Corps, 10 April 1942. NRL.

²¹ Letter, Commandant Marine Corps to CominCh, April 1942. NRL.

gestion was rejected by the Navy on the grounds that American carrier strength, notwithstanding a present imbalance in enemy forces, was not sufficient to justify risking two of these invaluable ships in an operation that would make necessary their maneuvering in a severely restricted area, exposed to constant danger from enemy land-based aircraft.²²

Following the great success at Midway, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, both alarmed by the steady and rapid southward extension of Japanese power through the Solomons, and quickened by the momentary breathing-space bought by our victory at Midway, undertook a reconsideration of basic U. S. strategy in the Pacific.

As is now well known, the fundamental strategic policy of the United States and Great Britain, as conceived at the outbreak of hostilities in 1941, had been to concentrate upon the defeat of Germany, with a definite second priority being accorded the effort against Japan.²³ In line with this policy, only such means had been apportioned to the Pacific war as would, in the judgment of the strategic planners, enable us to contain the Japanese, almost on their own terms. With this end in view, it had likewise been decided that no land offensive would be mounted in the Pacific before the fall of 1942, and that earlier operations would be limited to those necessary to establish and maintain our lines of communication to the Antipodes and to set up a few advanced bases required either for containment of the enemy or as springboards for the offensives in prospect. As we have seen, deployment for these purposes had commenced well prior to the Battle of Midway.

Now, however, the threat by the Japanese to our line of communication—and indeed, the ominous possibility that our precariously situated advanced outposts in the New Hebrides might be swallowed up—impelled a re-examination of possible courses of action in the Pacific.

²² Letter, Nimitz to MacArthur, 28 May 1942. NRL.

²³ *Riley Memo*.

On 25 June, King sent out two communications. He advised Nimitz and the Commander, Southwest Pacific Force,²⁴ that the Joint Chiefs of Staff had directed that an offensive be launched against the enemy forces in the Lower Solomons. Santa Cruz Island was to be seized and occupied, as were Tulagi and adjacent areas in the Solomons. Permanent occupation forces would be Army troops from Australia. The target date was about 1 August, and the operation was to be under the direction and control of CinCPac.²⁵

On the same day, however, he addressed a memo to Marshall, in which he said that it was urgent that the United States seize the initiative. He pointed out that a golden opportunity had passed—ideally, the offensive should have been launched about 3 June, when the main currents of Japanese strength were running toward Midway and Alaska. He urged that Marshall give favorable attention to the plan for attacking the Japanese in the Solomons area.

Marshall's answer, sent out next day, indicates clearly that despite the fact that an offensive had been directed, there was still no complete meeting of the minds between him and his Navy opposite number.

This time it was the question of command that gave the General pause. He did not agree that the proposed operation should be under Navy command. He pointed out that the area involved lay wholly within the Southwest Pacific, and he suggested strongly that General MacArthur was the only officer available capable of exercising command. He pointed out further that "we should not be bound by lines drawn on a map" and added that to his mind it would be most unfor-

²⁴ Two days before, an interesting message had been sent Ghormley by Nimitz. Very early in the morning of 23 June, Nimitz gave his subordinate the tally of the Midway victory, and suggested that the carriers consequently made available for other employment might be used by Ghormley as support for an operation aimed at driving the Japanese out of the Solomon Islands. *War Diary*, ComSoPac, June 1942. NRL.

²⁵ Dispatch, CominCh to CinCPac and ComSoWes-PacFor (with information copies to ComSoPac and Chief of Staff, USA), 25 June 1942. NRL.

fortunate to bring in another commander at that time to carry out the operation.²⁶

King stood fast. On the same day which saw General Vandegrift receiving first warning of the impending campaign from ComSoPac in Auckland, the Admiral sent a final uncompromising memo to Marshall. He said unequivocally that the operation must be under Nimitz, and that it could not be conducted in any other way. After the amphibious phase was over, then control would pass to MacArthur. The command setup must be made with a view toward success, said the Admiral, but the primary consideration was that the operation be begun at once. In answer to Marshall's plea that the area lay within MacArthur's bailiwick, he pointed out that all the forces involved would come, not from MacArthur, but from the South Pacific, and he included two prophetic statements. He expressed doubt that much aid at all could be got from the Southwest Pacific area (since the nearest bomber base in that area lay 975 miles from Tulagi) and said:

I think it is important that this [i. e. seizure of the initiative] be done even if no support of Army Forces in the South West Pacific area is made available.²⁷

In fact, Southwest Pacific air support during the assault was negligible, and no ground troop support was ever forthcoming from that area.

In the meantime, and in line with earlier plans for a more deliberate assumption of the offensive, a significant development had taken place in the command structure of the Pacific Ocean area. A huge geographic wedge, bounded on the north by the equator, on the west by 160° West Longitude, and extending indefinitely southward, had been designated the South Pacific Area. Vice Admiral Robert L. Ghormley, USN, had been selected to command it, under Nimitz.²⁸

Upon arrival in Pearl Harbor, Ghormley found out that whereas he was to command the South Pacific Area and South Pacific Force, including all air, sea, and ground forces (save ground troops actually assigned

the mission of defense of New Zealand) within the area, his powers hardly matched his responsibilities. Nimitz advised him that from time to time task forces would be sent on missions within his area. In such cases, Ghormley's degree of control consisted only of the ability to direct that such task force commanders carry out their assigned missions. Only in extraordinary circumstances would he exercise local control and initiative.²⁹

There were three steps in the establishment of Ghormley's command. On 22 May he set up his command post aboard the USS *Rigel* in the Harbor at Auckland, N. Z., as Prospective Commander, South Pacific Area and South Pacific Force. On 10 June he moved ashore to the New Government Building in the city of Auckland, still as Prospective Commander. On 19 June, satisfied at last that he had established adequate communications, he assumed full title and command.³⁰ He still anticipated a possible offensive in the fall.

On 25 June, he received dispatches telling him of an impending operation, to be mounted from his area and employ his forces. He was directed to begin planning at once with this in mind. The forces to be employed would be organized by CinCPac, and execution of the plan would be by directive from the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Two days later he was warned that Army participation in the operation, which had been assumed, might be delayed.³¹

Four days later, when General Vandegrift had been told of the plans and directed to make preparation, as will be described below, more definite information came to Ghormley

²⁶ Until 15 April, Ghormley had been Special Naval Observer at London and Commander, U. S. Naval Forces in Europe. Probably more conversant with the European situation than anyone else in the Navy, he was recalled to Washington, given an ominous mission and a hurried briefing, and sent on his way within a fortnight. He was warned by Admiral King that probably in the coming Fall an offensive would be begun from his area, but that it was impossible to give him proper tools for carrying out his mission. *Ghormley ms.*

²⁷ *War Diary*, ComSoPac, May, 1942. NRL.

²⁸ *War Diary*, ComSoPac, June, 1942. NRL.

²⁹ *War Diary*, ComSoPac, June, 1942.



GEN A. A. VANDEGRIFT, eighteenth Commandant of the Marine Corps, who led Marines to victory on Guadalcanal as commander of the 1st Marine Division (reinforced).

from Nimitz. Ghormley was told that he would command the operation, and that the joint forces would be under command of Vice Admiral Frank Jack Fletcher, who would assume command when he reported with Task Force 11 at rendezvous prior to movement to the target area. One week later, on 4 July, he received the Joint Chiefs' detailed plan.

The Commander, South Pacific Area, was faced with the two-headed problem of mounting an offensive at an almost impossibly early date with a barely adequate force. A slight amelioration of the time problem was offered when the target date was set back one week (see below); the problem of adequacy of means remained until the operation was well under way.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff directive of 2 July, relayed by Nimitz to Ghormley late the same day, set out succinctly the military aims of the moment for the war against Japan in the South Pacific and Southwest Pacific areas. The ultimate aim was the seizure and reduction of New Britain, New Ireland, and New Guinea. The purpose was, as we have seen, the removal of a serious threat to the lines of communication between the United States and Australia and New Zealand.

The realization of the ultimate goal involved the accomplishment of three tasks. First, it would be necessary to seize and occupy Santa Cruz, Tulagi, and the adjacent areas. Second, the rest of the Solomon Islands would have to be occupied and defended, as would Lae and Salamaua and the vicinity. Third, Rabaul and the surrounding territory would be taken.

The general considerations were that the Joint Chiefs would determine the forces, the timing, and the passage of command, that the date for undertaking Task 1³² would be about 1 August, and that throughout all three tasks, tactical command of the amphibious forces would vest in the Naval Task Force

³² During the concept and planning stage, Task 1 was given the code name PESTILENCE. The actual operation of the assault on Tulagi and Guadalcanal carried the designation WATCHTOWER, while Guadalcanal itself, as a place, was called, appropriately, CACTUS.

Commander. For Task 1, CinCPac would designate the forces to be used, for Tasks 2 and 3, the selection would be left to General MacArthur. Effective on 1 August, the boundary of the South Pacific Area was to be moved one degree west, to 159° East Longitude. It was assumed that Ghormley would be the Task Force Commander for Task 1, "which he should lead in person in the operating area." Ghormley was directed to confer with MacArthur.³³

The result of the conference, at which MacArthur and the Admiral found themselves in complete agreement, was that a dispatch was sent jointly by them to King and Marshall. In essence, the message urged strongly that the proposed operation be postponed until such time as American strength in the South and Southwest Pacific had been built up sufficiently—especially in the matter of air power—to provide adequate support for the assault.³⁴

The Joint Chiefs of Staff replied to the effect that although all arguments presented by Ghormley and MacArthur were valid, it was imperative that the operation go forward. Additional shipborne aircraft and surface forces would be made available. Thirty-five heavy bombers, presently in Hawaii, would be supplied by the Army, which also planned to "take all the follow-up measures possible in support of the seizure and occupation of the Tulagi Area."³⁵ The message also directed Ghormley to itemize to the Joint Chiefs additional forces essential to the success of the operation and not available to him.

Ghormley, in turn, replied that he considered the forces available—or to be made available in accordance with the Joint Chiefs' assurances—to be adequate for the immediate

³³ *War Diary*, ComSoPac, 4 July 1942. NRL.

³⁴ Upon receipt of this plea, King wrote Marshall, noting that whereas three weeks before, MacArthur had wanted to move straight to Rabaul, he now objected to an assault upon a much less formidable target. He pointed out that if the Japanese were permitted to consolidate their holding at Tulagi, they would be in a position to harass the United States base at Efate and lines of communications. Memo, King to Marshall, 10 July 1942. NRL.

³⁵ *Ghormley ms*, pp. 52 and 53.

task, *provided* that General MacArthur have sufficient means for interdicting hostile aircraft activities on New Britain, New Guinea, and the Northern Solomons. His reply contained the following prophetic words:

I desire to emphasize that the basic problem of this operation is the protection of surface ships against land based aircraft attack during the approach, the landing, and the unloading.³⁶

General MacArthur, again seeing eye to eye with Ghormley, requested planes, and more planes, for the purpose of supporting the operation.

And so, while King's reiteration of *attack, seize the initiative, and do it now* was beginning to take on the throbbing insistence of a war drum, and while Marshall was temporizing in his replies to him, the plans for the offensive began to be implemented. On 10 July Admiral Nimitz sent Ghormley his operation order covering the proposed seizure of Tulagi and Guadalcanal. The operation was to bear the name WATCHTOWER.

U. S. MEANS AVAILABLE

When Ghormley received his first warning order, on 25 June, the 1st Marine Division, Fleet Marine Force (or FMF, as usually abbreviated) under the command of Major General Alexander Archer Vandegrift, was in process of moving from the United States to Wellington, New Zealand. The advance echelon³⁷ had arrived on 14 June, and the rear was at sea.

This division, which in fact constituted the major available Marine Corps unit in readiness for employment on short notice³⁸ was itself understrength by about one-third, one of its rifle regiments, the 7th Marines (rein-

³⁶ *Ghormley ms.*, p. 54.

³⁷ *Final Report*, Phase I, p. 1, and Annex A to that document. The advance echelon consisted of the 5th Marines (reinforced), Division Headquarters, and certain division troops, and was embarked in the *Electra*, *Del Brazil*, and *Wakefield*. The rear echelon, consisting of the 1st Marines (reinforced) and the rest of the division troops was on board the *Lipscomb Lykes*, *Alcyone*, *Libra*, *Alchiba*, *Mizar*, *Ericsson*, *Elliot*, and *Burnett*. The ships were not combat loaded.

forced),³⁹ having been temporarily detached on 21 March 1942 to become part of the 3d Marine Brigade, on duty in Samoa.

Other FMF units were deployed at this time to the maximum capacity of the Marine Corps throughout the Pacific, both within and outside Admiral Ghormley's area. American Samoa was defended by the 2d and 3d Provisional Marine Brigades, the 2d, 7th and 8th Defense Battalions (of the Marine Corps) and the 1st Marine Raider Battalion. At Palmyra, Johnston, Midway, and the Hawaiian Islands other FMF troops, mainly defense battalions or aviation units, were likewise disposed to form a thin screen of defense for outlying Allied bases and lines of communication. Of a total strength of 142,613, the Marine Corps had 56,783 officers and men serving overseas at the time.

When decision to strike was reached, the 1st Marine Division was in process of moving from the United States to New Zealand, for what General Vandegrift thought was to be several months of training.⁴⁰ The first echelon of the division had arrived at Wellington in organizationally-loaded ships and

³⁸ The 2d Division was at Camp Elliott, California, being whipped into shape after losing many of its experienced officers and men to newly formed regiments. One of its rifle regiments, the 8th Marines (reinforced) was also in Samoa, having departed the United States in January, 1942. Another, the 6th Marines, had recently returned from seven months in Iceland.

³⁹ The use of odd numbers for all components of the Division bears explanation here. There was a division on each coast — the 1st at New River, North Carolina, the 2d at Camp Elliott, near San Diego, California. Current practice made all components of the East Coast unit odd numbered, while the corresponding components of the West Coast division bore even numbers. This practice was in process of disappearing at the time — the 9th Marines, for example, was formed at Camp Elliott from a cadre supplied by the 2d Division and received its preliminary training with that division.

⁴⁰ General Vandegrift was under the impression that his division would not be called upon for combat prior to the early part of 1943. *Division Commander's Final Report on Guadalcanal Operation*, April 1943. Phase I (Hereinafter *Final Report*). In Marine Corps Records (hereinafter MCR). Vandegrift was not at this time aware of tentative plans for the fall of 1942.

had begun to unload and go into camp. The second echelon was at sea, likewise in organizationally-loaded vessels, and was not expected to arrive until 11 July, less than three weeks before the target date.

To supplement the Marine Forces enroute to, or already on duty in the South Pacific, Army ground and service troops were now to be found at New Caledonia,⁴¹ the Fiji Islands (where they had been sent to replace a New Zealand Division withdrawn for defense of New Zealand), Tongatabu, and the New Hebrides. These forces, together with Army air units within the area, initially were controlled directly by Ghormley. On 1 July, however, CominCh informed him that Major General Millard Harmon, USA, was to be appointed to command of all Army forces in the South Pacific Area, with the title of Commanding General, South Pacific Area. Harmon, in turn, would be under Ghormley's command and responsible directly to him.⁴² The appointment was made and Harmon began his duties late in July.

Within the naval structure of the Pacific Ocean Areas, Ghormley, as we have seen, occupied the position, under Admiral Nimitz, of a major subordinate of limited autonomy. Specifically, his powers were as follows:

1. Nimitz from time to time would order Task Force Commanders to report to Ghormley for duty, with missions already assigned.
2. Ghormley, in turn, would direct such commanders to carry out their assigned missions (as given them by Nimitz).
3. "The Commander, South Pacific Force would not interfere in the Task Force Commander's mission unless circumstances, presumably not known to the Commander-in-Chief, Pacific Fleet, indicated that specific measures were required to be performed by the Task Force Commander. The Commander,

⁴¹ The New Caledonia force, composed mainly of National Guard units, became the Americal Division on 24 May 1942 under command of Major General Alexander Patch, USA. The division served throughout the war without a numerical designation under the name which was formed by combining syllables of American and New Caledonia.

⁴² *Ghormley ms*, p. 42. Ghormley confesses to an initial dislike of the idea. He later came to look upon Harmon as one of the finest administrators and coordinators he had ever met. (Information given in interview in January, 1949.)

South Pacific Force would then direct the Task Force Commander to take such measures."⁴³

The naval strength that could be called upon to operate in support of Ghormley's offensive was small in point of number of ships, albeit included in that number there was considerable power. Three aircraft carriers, with a strength of about 250 planes, were available, as were a number of light and heavy cruisers, two new battleships, and the requisite screening vessels and auxiliary craft. Transports and cargo vessels were at a premium, and would continue so for several months.

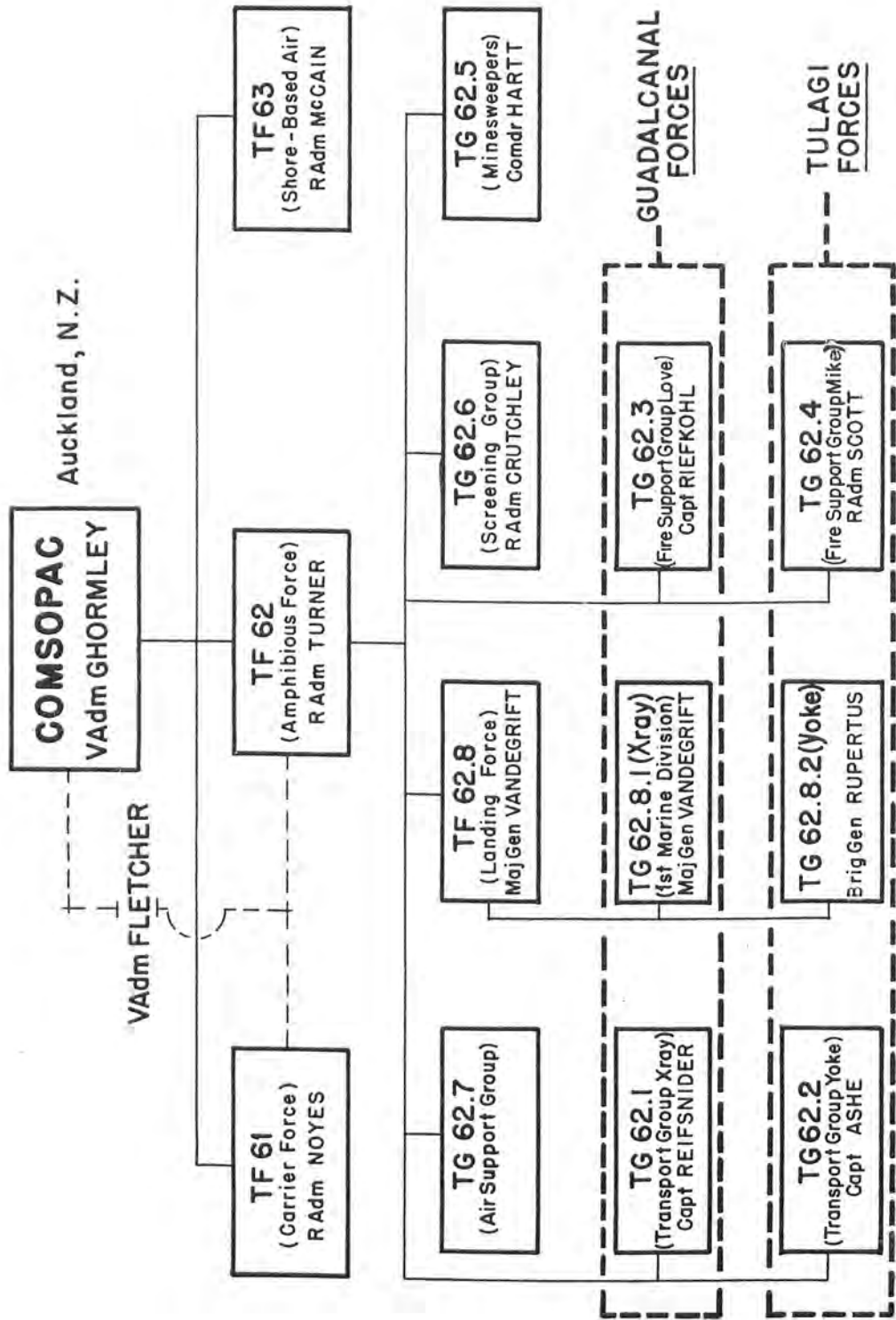
In air strength, an indispensable adjunct to modern amphibious operations, the picture was by no means as bright. In addition to the approximately 250 carrier aircraft mentioned above (available to him only under certain conditions), Ghormley could muster 166 Navy and Marine Corps planes (including two Marine Corps squadrons—VMF-212 and VMO-251) 95 Army planes, and 30 planes from the Royal New Zealand Air Force. This total of 291 aircraft was under the command of Rear Admiral John S. McCain, USN, whose title was Commander Aircraft South Pacific and who was under Ghormley's command.⁴⁴

Taken all in all, therefore, Ghormley could rely on the services of a small, highly trained striking force of ground troops, consisting of less than one Marine division with its supporting organic units, surface forces of fluctuating and never overwhelming power (which nevertheless represented the maximum which Admiral Nimitz could spare) and an extremely scanty array of land based aircraft. He had no assurances of reserve ground troops for the coming operation (although plans were under way to release both the 7th and 8th Marines from their Samoan defense missions)⁴⁵ and he had been advised that garrison forces would have to come from

⁴³ *War Diary*, ComSoPac, 9 May 1942. NRL.

⁴⁴ *History of Marine Corps Aviation in World War II*, Robert Sherrod, 1949.

⁴⁵ Relief for 7th Marines was to leave the United States on 20 July (PICADOR Plan) and that for the 8th on 1 September (OPIUM Plan). *War Diary*, ComSoPac, June 1942.



TASK ORGANIZATION AND COMMAND STRUCTURE GUADALCANAL-TULAGI ASSAULTS

August 1942

the troops within his area who already were committed to base defense.⁴⁶

The general structure organized to employ these resources against the Japanese was laid down in Nimitz' order to Ghormley of 9 July, and Ghormley's Operation Plan 1-42 of 17 July 1942.⁴⁷

Ghormley, exercising strategic command, set up his organization in three main groups:

The Carrier Force (Task Force 61) commanded by Rear Admiral Leigh Noyes, was composed of elements of three task forces from Nimitz' area—11, 16, and 18. It would include three carriers—*Saratoga*, *Enterprise*, and *Wasp*—the fast new battleship *North Carolina*, five heavy cruisers, one so-called anti-aircraft cruiser, and 16 destroyers.

The Amphibious Force (Task Force 62) commanded by Rear Admiral Richmond K. Turner, USN, included the FMF Landing Force,⁴⁸ six heavy cruisers, two light cruisers, 15 destroyers, 13 attack transports, six attack cargo ships, four destroyer transports, and five minesweepers.

Shore-Based Aircraft (Task Force 63) under command of Rear Admiral J. S. McCain, USN (ComAirSoPac) included all aircraft in the area save only carrier-based naval planes.

Complicating the foregoing symmetrical structure was the presence of Vice Admiral Fletcher as tactical commander of the joint attack and support forces. (See footnote on Nimitz' Operation Order No. 34-42 above).

⁴⁶ Admiral King's effort to secure quick release for the assault troops was not successful. The Army's commitments to the European Theater were such that no units were available for such missions. Initially assured that air support and air replacements would be available, King was advised by Lieutenant General Joseph C. McNarney, USA, acting Chief of Staff, on 27 July that commitments in other areas would not permit further air reinforcements for the South Pacific—a dictum which King protested strongly in a memo to Marshall on 1 August. NRL.

⁴⁷ *Ghormley ms.*, pp. 54 and 58.

⁴⁸ It will be noted that the landing force commander General Vandegrift was directly assigned as a subordinate within the command of the Amphibious Force Commander (Admiral Turner), a relationship that was to prove to be both unrealistic and troublesome.

Fletcher was already familiar to the Marines as a result of his role in the attempt to relieve Wake Island.⁴⁹

Ghormley also announced that there would be a rehearsal in the Fiji area prior to departure for the assault and directed that all task force commanders arrange to hold a conference near the rehearsal area. He himself would move to Noumea about 1 August in order to comply with his orders to exercise strategic command within the operating area.⁵⁰

By this time the planning and the resultant orders had taken final form. The target had been selected, the forces organized which were to strike at the target. The Navy had leeway, thanks to the 2 July directive which, by moving the South Pacific boundary one degree west, had made it possible for Ghormley's forces to operate without poaching in the territory of the Southwest Pacific.

Only one detail remained unsettled. The target date, set up first in the warning orders Ghormley received on 24 June and reiterated in the 2 July directive, was still 1 August and impossibly close. Vandegrift pointed out to Ghormley that the late arrival of his second echelon, taken in conjunction with an unforeseen stretch of bad weather, had so complicated his loading problem as to make it impossible to meet the date set. Ghormley agreed, suggesting that at least a week additional time would be needed. Nimitz concurred, passing along the request to King. King agreed to set back the date to 7 August, and Ghormley was so notified, with the stipulation that this was the latest date permissible and that every effort should be made to advance it if possible.⁵¹ The new date was incorporated in Ghormley's Operation Order 1-42, of 17 July 1942, in which the foregoing task force structure was set up and which contained the additional admonition that all

⁴⁹ See *The Defense of Wake*, by LtCol R. D. Heinl, Jr., the official Marine Corps narrative of that operation.

⁵⁰ *Ghormley ms.*, p. 59.

⁵¹ *War Diary*, ComSoPac, July, 1942. NRL.

ships of the joint force should fuel to capacity at the conclusion of the rehearsal.

Inasmuch as Admiral Turner's amphibious force (Task Force 62) was the one which included the Landing Force and which would carry out the actual assault and landings on Guadalcanal and Tulagi, the internal structure of that command requires our attention.

Like all such task forces it was subdivided into internal components, each known as a task group. One of these was that commanded by General Vandegrift, while others included fire-support ships, transports, minesweepers, and such other units as are required to carry out the naval phase of a landing operation. Within General Vandegrift's command there existed two principal subdivisions, to which appropriate transport task-groups of Admiral Turner's force corresponded—namely, the units assigned, respectively, for the Tulagi and the Guadalcanal assaults. These will be described in detail at a later point.

ACCUMULATION OF INTELLIGENCE

From an intelligence point of view, the Guadalcanal-Tulagi landings can hardly be described as more than a stab in the dark. When General Vandegrift received his initial warning-order on 26 June 1942, neither his staff nor the local New Zealand authorities had more than the most general and sketchy knowledge of the objective area,⁵² or the enemy's strength and disposition therein. What was more, less than a month was available between the announcement of the mission and the scheduled date of mounting out, 22 July. During the four weeks at hand, every effort had to be, and was, bent toward piercing the fog of blank ignorance and some misinformation which enshrouded Guadalcanal and Tulagi.

As is the case with most tropical backwaters, the charting and hydrographic information was scanty and out of date. Re-

⁵² *Final Report*, Phase I, p. 3, and Annex E to that document. Admiral Ghormley was in no better shape in the matter. His most up-to-date chart of the area was one printed in 1908. *Ghormley ms*, p. 11.

course thus was automatically directed toward individuals with on-the-spot experience who could be discovered either in New Zealand or Australia. The accumulation, evaluation, and dissemination of this material fell to Lieutenant Colonel Frank B. Goettge, Intelligence Officer of the 1st Marine Division. Colonel Goettge's first step was to locate such persons, mainly traders, planters, ship-masters, and a few miners, who had visited or lived at Guadalcanal or Tulagi. A number of possible likely sources, he soon found, were now living in Australia, and, while his subordinates set about tabulating the formal data available, Goettge set out for Australia on 2 July, returning to New Zealand on the 13th.⁵³

Long after the conclusion of the campaign, in the late winter of 1943, it was learned that Colonel Goettge's efforts deserved a better success than they had enjoyed. During his hurried trip to Australia, he arranged with the Southwest Pacific Area for maps to be made from a strip of aerial photographs and to be delivered prior to the sortie of the 1st Marine Division. These were never delivered, and the incident apparently was forgotten by the 1st Division staff.

After the arrival of the Division in Australia, however, Lieutenant Colonel Edmund J. Buckley, who succeeded Colonel Goettge as D-2, was asked by an Army officer whether the maps he had prepared had been useful. Further inquiry by Buckley brought to light the information that a special flight had been made, photographs taken, and a map made and sent to New Zealand. Nothing further was done in the matter at the time.

During the summer of 1948 a letter was sent to Dr. John Miller, an Army historian and former Marine, by Colonel E. F. Kumpe, of the Corps of Engineers. Pertinent extracts are quoted herewith through the courtesy of Dr. Miller:

Colonel E. J. Buckley, USMC, the G-2 of the 1st Marine Division following the death of Colonel Goettge is quite correct in his recollection. I was at that time the map chief for SWPA and also the Commanding Officer of the 648th Engineer Topo-

⁵³ *Final Report*, Phase I, p. 3 and Annex E.

graphic Battalion which had recently arrived at Melbourne. The red rush job at that time was the preparation of photomaps for Guadalcanal. The photography was flown by Colonel Karl L. Polifka of the Air Force, now in Quarters 200 at Maxwell Field, and consisted of two strips along the north shore of the island. The following information is not a tale of woe, but a very distressing account of what eventuated at that time. The photographs were printed in the north, and the prints and negatives assigned A-1 priority for shipment to GHQ and subsequently to the map plant. They were diverted for approximately 10 days due to a whim of the Transportation Officer at Townsville, and subsequently delivered to the map plant. Unfortunately, I do not recall the specific date, but it was in advance of the operation.

At the base map plant three sets of duplicate prints were prepared and transmitted to Auckland, and a duplicate set of negatives was also prepared by hand. An additional set of prints was assembled in the form of a mosaic on a concrete floor as equipment had not yet been received and was compiled for civilian reproduction in Melbourne. Manuscript copies of these photo-maps were transmitted in three separate shipments to Auckland with request for bulk distribution.

No bulk distribution request was received and it was a matter of considerable surprise to discover that neither the photograph nor the photo-maps had been available to the 1st Marine Division. An informal investigation after the operation brought out the information that the maps had been lost in the tremendous pile of boxes incident to the organizing of the base establishment of South Pacific (SOPAC). Colonel Buckley stated on subsequent occasions that some oblique photographs captured from the Japanese were the only source of maps during the opening phases of the operation. On the second operation of the 1st Marine Division at Cape Gloucester, New Britain, they received the best maps then available for any operation in the western Pacific, both in the form of topographic maps and with a back printing of the photo-maps, and were duly grateful.

The story does not sound too good in its reflection on the coordination between theaters. However, in this particular case, every effort was made from the western Pacific to send forward all they had to meet the operational dates.

This unfortunate series of events was unknown and unsuspected at the time. All that was known was that a search carried out with great intensity failed almost utterly to produce usable and dependable maps and charts. The Marines were reduced to using what they could gather of the personal knowledge of former residents or travelers of the area.

The fruits of Colonel Goettge's inquiries



GUADALCANAL PRESENTS A VARIED TERRAIN: this view looking south over Point Cruz shows the jumble of sharp-grassed ridges, foothills and mountainous jungle which was Guadalcanal.

may be summarized for the benefit of the reader, with appropriate corrections, in terms of a general description of the area which would soon become so familiar to members of the 1st and 2d Marine Divisions.

Tulagi and Guadalcanal, the targets of the operation, are dissimilar physically. Tulagi is a relatively small island lying within an indentation on the coast of Florida, the largest island of the Nggela Group. It is a hilly mass, heavily wooded and with little level ground. Its chief importance lies in that it guards an excellent small harbor and is the seat of government of the British Solomon Islands.

To the east of its southern extremity lie two small, hilly islands, Gavutu and Tanambogo. A causeway connects the pair, of which Gavutu is the larger. They are by far the most important of Tulagi's peripheral islands.

Guadalcanal, on the other hand, is a land mass about 90 miles in length whose long axis lies in a southeasterly-northwesterly direction. It presents a varied terrain, with plains, foothills, and mountains and with a range of vegetation that runs from grassy plains to true rainforest and jungle.

The mountain backbone of the island is parallel to the long axis. The slope to the southwest is abrupt, and there is little extensive plains country on that side of the

island. On the opposite coast, however, from the mouth of the Lunga River to the east, there is a wide belt of plains, cut by rivers and covered with jungles interspersed with broad patches of grass lands. These well watered plains are ideal for the development of copra plantations, for which purpose they have been used since the beginning of the century. Rainfall is extremely heavy, and changes in season are marked only by changes in intensity of precipitation. This, together with an average temperature in the high 80's, results in a humid, unhealthy climate. Malaria, dengue, and other fevers, as well as fungus infections, afflict the population.

Rivers are numerous, and from the military point of view may be divided arbitrarily in two classes. The first of these is the long, swift, relatively shallow river that may be forded at numerous points. Generally deep for a short distance up from its mouth, it presents few problems in the matter of crossing. Examples of this type are the Tenaru, the Lunga, and the Balesuna.

The second type is that of the slow and deep lagoon. Such streams are sometimes of inconsiderable length, as in the case of the Alligator Creek, and again are merely the coastal extremities of rivers of considerable size, as in the case of the Matanikau. This type, because of its depth and the precipitous nature of its banks, was an admirable defensive aid.

Beaches on both Tulagi and Guadalcanal were frequently treacherous because of the broad coral formations. In the vicinity of the Lunga, however, and in some spots farther to the northwest, it was possible to bring large craft almost to the shoreline because of the close-in steep-to.

Although this accumulation of data afforded much enlightenment beyond the little previously known, it included corresponding minor misinformation and many aggravating gaps, for detailed information in a form suitable for military operations was mainly lacking.

In spite of the number of years which had elapsed since initiation of the systematic economic development of the islands by the



British, not a single accurate or complete map of Guadalcanal or Tulagi existed in the summer of 1942. The hydrographic charts, containing just sufficient data to enable trading schooners to keep from grounding, were little better, although these did essay to locate a few outstanding terrain features of some use for making a landfall or conducting forms of triangulation. In one case, in fact, Mount Austen (Mambulo was its native name) was assigned as an immediate objective, only to have the discovery made—after the Guadalcanal landing—that, instead of being but a few hundred yards away from the beaches, it actually lay several miles distant, across almost impassable jungle.⁵⁴

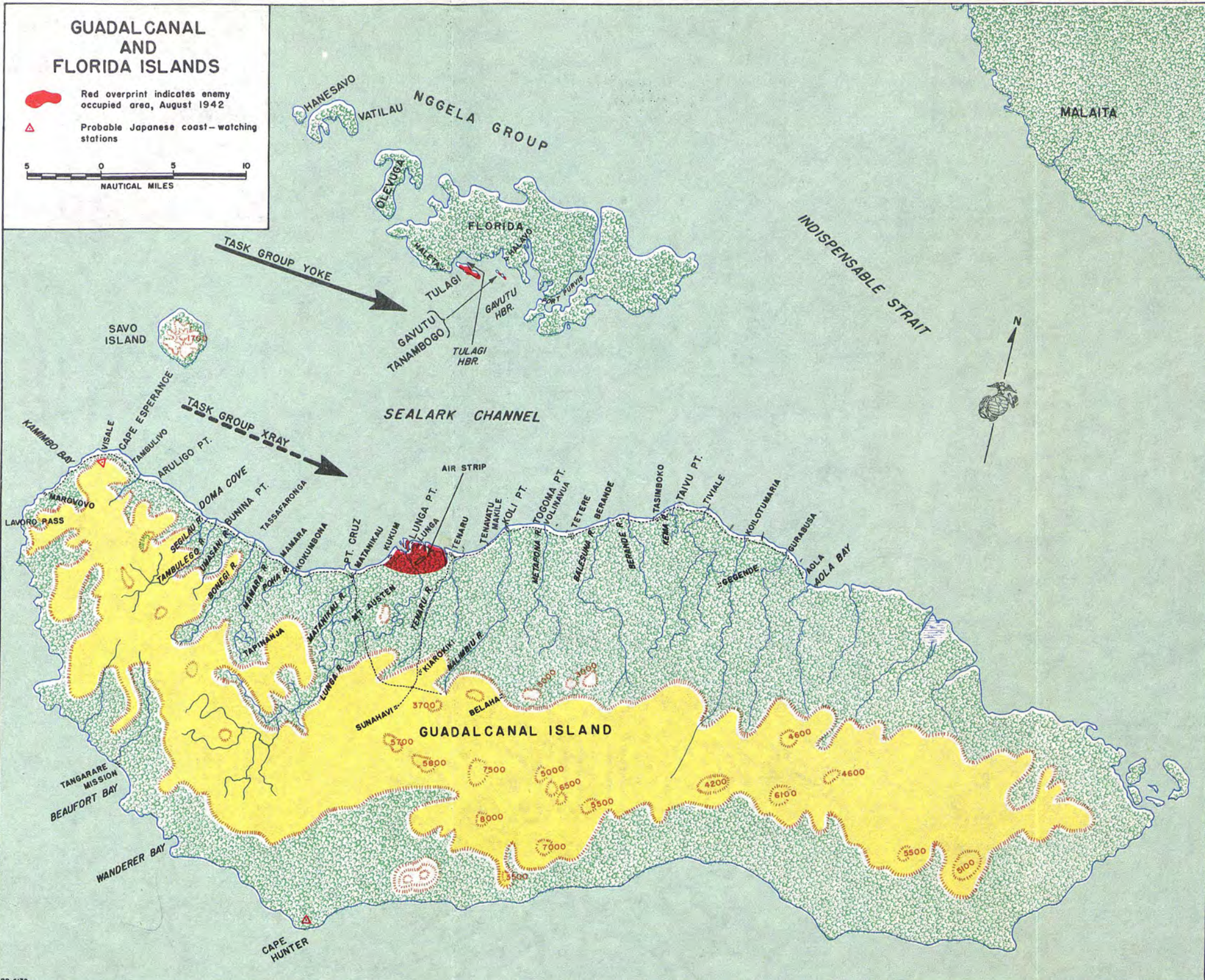
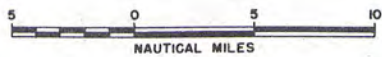
The second and more profitable source of up-to-date information would of course be aerial photographs, but the paucity of long-range aircraft and suitably located bases, together with the short notice upon which planning had been launched, combined to restrict availability of aerial photos in the quantity and quality normally considered necessary for Fleet Marine Force landing operations.

Perhaps the most useful photographic sortie carried out prior to the Guadalcanal-Tulagi landings (except for the fruitless effort described previously) was that undertaken by an Army B-17 aircraft in which Lieutenant Colonel Merrill B. Twining (assistant operations officer (D-3) of the 1st Marine Division) and Major William B. McKean (member of the staff of Transport Squadron 26) conducted a personal reconnaissance of the landing areas. This flight took off from and returned to Port Moresby New Guinea, on 17 July, and was, in fact,

⁵⁴ This was the so-called "Grassy Knoll" assigned to the 1st Marines. Long-time Guadalcanal residents described it as lying virtually within the perimeter area ultimately occupied and defended by General Vandegrift, whereas its true location was six miles to the southwest. This discrepancy, unexplained for years, has given much cause for speculation to historians of the Guadalcanal campaign, some of whom have raised the question whether Mount Austen was really the "Grassy Knoll" which Goettge's informants had in mind. This school of thought suggests that the only feature which could possibly fall within the described limits would have been the high ground later to become known as Edson's Ridge.

GUADALCANAL AND FLORIDA ISLANDS

-  Red overprint indicates enemy occupied area, August 1942
-  Probable Japanese coast-watching stations





SOUTH PACIFIC JUNGLE reminded old-time Marines of Nicaragua or Haiti, but proved itself a formidable enemy to both Japanese and Marines.

the first occasion during the war upon which Guadalcanal was sighted by U. S. Marines. The route followed made landfall in the vicinity of Cape Esperance, then proceeded to Tulagi Bay (where float-equipped Zero fighters could be seen preparing to take off on intercept), and then swung on a return leg along the north coast of Guadalcanal from Aola Bay westward toward the intended beachhead. Photostrips were taken all the way. Just as the bomber approached Lunga Point, however, the critical point of the reconnaissance and the area in which the Japanese were reportedly developing their Guadalcanal air-strip, the Zero fighters, which had now gained altitude, swarmed down. In the resultant melee, photography was of course impossible, and visual observation became largely valueless. Under the circumstances, therefore, and because the "turn-back" point had now been well passed, the reconnaissance could not be retraced. Thus neither Twining nor McKean could obtain positive informa-

tion as to the progress of the Japanese in completing their field although they could ultimately reassure General Vandegrift as to the evident suitability of the Lunga beaches for landing. The return trip to Port Moresby was rendered successful by Major McKean's supervision of the somewhat haphazard navigation, on the basis of his Naval Academy training of years gone by.⁵⁵

The coastal map of Guadalcanal finally adopted as official by the 1st Marine Division (and employed, with such corrections as could later be developed, throughout the entire campaign) was traced from an aerial strip-map obtained by Colonel Goettge on his mission to Australia, and, while reasonably accurate as to general outline, contained no usable indications of ground-forms or elevations. The Goettge map—a section of which is reproduced in this monograph as an indication of the crudeness of the topographic material available—was distributed to units of the division prior to departure from Wellington. This was supplemented by aerial photos of Tulagi, Gavutu, and Tanambogo Islands, and these constituted, altogether, the sum of what the 1st Marine Division was to know of Tulagi and Guadalcanal prior to the landings.⁵⁶

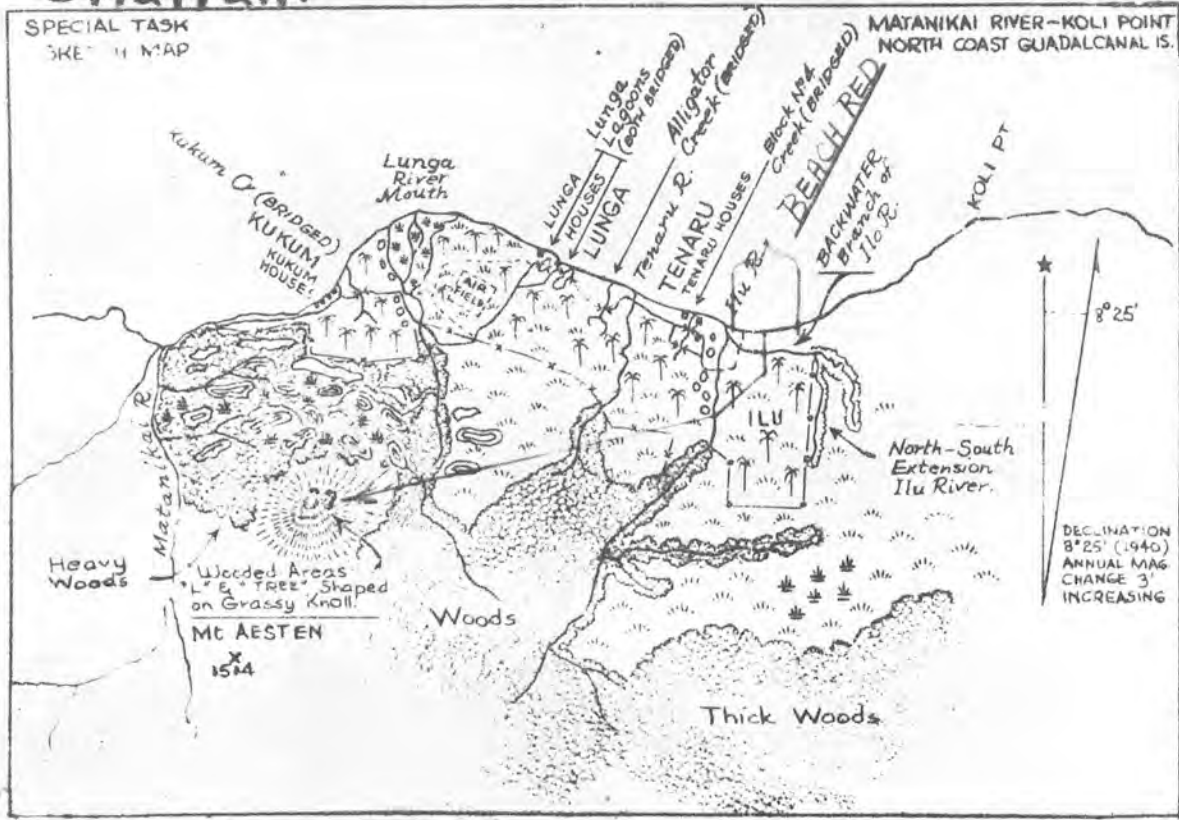
Of the enemy's strength, dispositions and activities, it was known to the U. S. planners—largely from coastwatcher reports⁵⁷—that the Japanese forces had established their headquarters in the former British governmental seat at Tulagi, that they had occupied and installed defensive positions on nearby Gavutu and Tanambogo, and that their con-

⁵⁵ Information this flight obtained from Historical Section interview with Col. William B. McKean, 18 February 1948.

⁵⁶ Two aerial photos, taken on 2 August by a Com-AirSoPac B-17 and developed aboard the USS *Enterprise*, were forwarded to Division Headquarters. They showed Tulagi defensive positions in sharp detail, and verified the reports of coastwatchers about the rapidly approaching completion of the air strip in the Lunga plains. *Final Report*, Phase I, Annex E, p. 5.

⁵⁷ "The invaluable service of the Solomon Islands coastwatching system . . . cannot be too highly commended." *Final Report*, Phase I, Annex E, p. 2.

Chalfant



Prepared under the direction of the Commander Combat Team No. 5; 1942. From Special Sketch submitted, and controlled by Map, North Coast of Guadalcanal Island, R.F. 1:95,040; 14 July, 1942.

R.F. 1:95,040 Natural Scale 1:108,643 Cartographic & Reproduction Unit, Combat of No. 5
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SPECIAL NOTE: This map was reproduced from Special Sketch Map drawn from the information supplied by a man thoroughly familiar with the terrain shown. It is an approximate pictorial representation drawn from this person's memory. It is not to be construed as being an accurate map.

SYMBOLS:

- | | | | |
|--------|---------------------------------------|--------|--|
| —o—o—o | DEEP DITCHES, WITH HOLES | —x—x—x | FIVE STRAND BARBED WIRE FENCES (GOOD REPAIR). |
| — — — | GRASS PLAINS (THICK: 4 TO 6 FT. HIGH) | —o—o—o | FENCE, (TEN YEAR OLD) |
| — — — | SWAMP. | — — — | BRIDGES, 3 TON LIMIT, ONE WAY TRAFFIC. |
| — — — | COCONUT PALMS AND GRASS LAND. | — — — | KIKUM, LUNGA, TENARU and ILU, are Plantations. |
| — — — | KNOLLS. | | |

CRUDE MAPS handicapped General Vandegrift both in planning and operations. One, dated 14 July 1942, demonstrates the paucity of what was known before landing; the other, a month later, is little better than a battlefield sketch, but the best available.

struction forces were busily at work across the Sealark Channel on the Guadalcanal airfield project. We have also seen that coast-watching stations had been set up on Florida, Malaita, and Guadalcanal.

Estimates of enemy strength were by no means as definite or convincing as were the

factual accounts of the defenses. Various intelligence estimates, prepared during July, gave figures as high as 8,400, while Admiral Turner's Operation Plan A3-42, issued at the rehearsals at Koro Island on 30 July, gave it as the Admiral's opinion that 1850 enemy would be found on Tulagi and Gavutu-Tanam-

bogo, and 5275 on Guadalcanal. Both figures were high. A count of enemy dead in the Tulagi and Gavutu area placed the number of defenders at about 1500 (including 600 laborers) while a study of positions, interrogation of prisoners, and translation of enemy documents on Guadalcanal proper indicated that about 2230 troops and laborers had been in the Lunga area at the time of the Marines' landing.⁵⁸

Close and determined combat was anticipated with these forces; what the future held in the way of counterblows, the 1st Marine Division had no way of foreseeing.⁵⁹

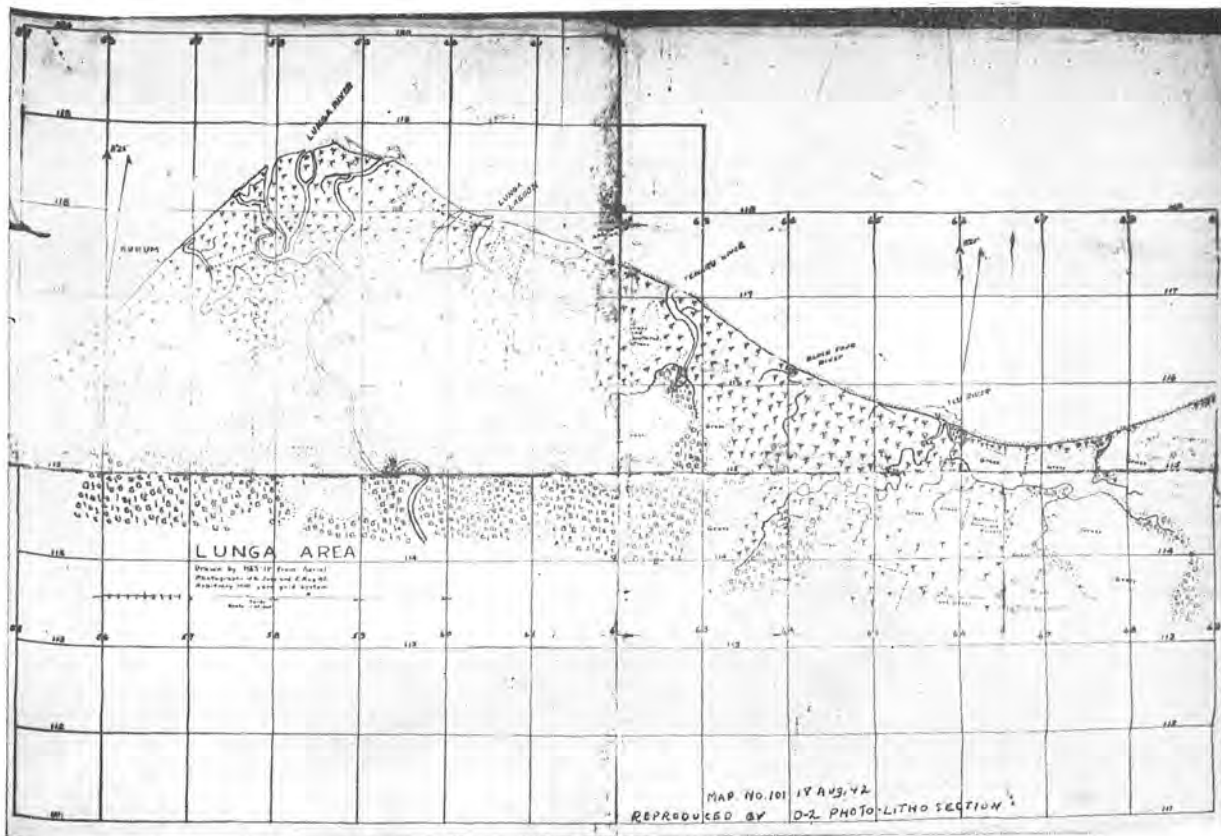
⁵⁸ *Final Report*, Phase II, p. 8, and *Boardman ms.*

⁵⁹ Nimitz was preoccupied with this very problem. On 17 July he wrote King saying that it would be unsafe to assume that the enemy would not attempt to retake the area to be attacked, and that if insufficient forces were assigned, the Marines might not be able to hold on. Dispatch, CinCPac to CominCh, 17 July 1942. NRL.

PLANNING AND MOUNTING OUT

Tactically speaking, the task assigned the 1st Marine Division was dual in character, not only because of the considerable physical separation between its two initial objectives, that is, Guadalcanal and Tulagi, but because hard fighting was expected during or immediately after the latter landing. On the other hand, it was hoped that the former beachhead could be secured without instantaneous enemy reaction. This duality had, as we have seen, shaped General Vandegrift's task-organization into two landing forces: Group X-Ray (Guadalcanal) and Group Yoke (Tulagi). It likewise guided the Marine commander in his assignment of units to these two groups.

To the Tulagi group — commanded by Brigadier General William H. Rupertus, assistant division commander to General Vandegrift—the latter assigned the 1st Marine Raider Battalion (Lieutenant Colonel Merritt



A. Edson); the 1st Parachute Battalion (Major Robert H. Williams); and the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines (Lieutenant Colonel Harold E. Rosecrans). These were then considered to be the best-trained units, and therefore more suitable for the sharp work ahead.⁶⁰

The Guadalcanal group, under General Vandegriff's personal leadership, would comprise the other two combat groups (as they were then styled) within the 1st Marine Division,⁶¹ plus the balance of the division special and service troops.

The northern scheme of maneuver, that on Tulagi, called for a landing on the south shore by the 1st Raider Battalion and 2d Battalion, 5th Marines, in column in that order, the attack then wheeling right (east) and moving down the long axis of the island. This would be followed by further landings by the Parachute Battalion on Gavutu and Tanambogo, plus a mop-up sweep by a Battalion (less one company) along Florida Island's coastline fronting Tulagi Bay.

The scheme on Guadalcanal envisaged landing the 5th Marines (less 2d Bn) across a beach somewhat removed to the eastward from whatever defended beaches or other defenses which the Japanese might have set up in the Lunga delta. This unit, landing on the right half of the beach with two battalions abreast, was to be followed by the 1st Marines in column of battalions. The units thus landed would therefore be assured no more than minor resistance at worst, plus the subsequent opportunity of assembling and forming for an overland attack to the west from an established beachhead. These schemes of

maneuver were embodied in 1st Marine Division Operation Order 7-42, issued on 20 July at Wellington.⁶²

In the attack on an area supposed, altogether, to be defended by more than 5,000 enemy, it will be realized that a division less one-third of its strength (i.e., the 7th Marines, reinforced) would have little if any margin in reserve. To remedy this hazard, Admiral King proposed, on 27 June, that the 2d Marines⁶³ (reinforced), including its supporting light artillery battalion (3d Battalion, 10th Marines) and normal reinforcing elements, be ordered from San Diego, combat-loaded, to serve as landing force reserve.⁶⁴

While the foregoing operational plans were in process of preparation, and while the accumulation and collation of intelligence progressed as best it could, the Guadalcanal landing force found itself confronted by a logistic task of monumental proportions. This was the job of completely unloading its original shipping; sorting and reloading its equipment and supplies; and accomplishing all this with troop labor under an intolerable pressure of time.

The reason for this massive reshuffle was that, as originally mounted out from the United States, the 1st Marine Division's shipping had been organizationally loaded, that is, equipment and supplies had been stowed aboard ship to take maximum advantage of hold-space, rather than in the uneconomical but necessary method known as combat-loading, whereby items are placed so as to be ready for unloading in accordance with the priority of their necessity in an assault landing. Inasmuch as shipping was scanty and overburdened, and, as originally planned, the 1st Division would not be employed in

⁶⁰ *Final Report*, Phase I, p. 4.

⁶¹ At this time, the standard phrase "regimental combat team" (RCT) had not come into uniform use. What we would now style an RCT was what Guadalcanal Marines labelled a combat group, that is, a rifle regiment with its direct-support artillery battalion, engineers, signal, medical, and other combined supporting elements. Within the so-called *combat groups*, similar battalion-sized aggregations were designated *combat teams*. This usage will be followed throughout this monograph.

⁶² This order did not reach the 1st Raider Battalion and the 2d Marines until these units joined the main force in the rehearsal area on 27 July.

⁶³ This unit was to be employed to carry out projected landings at Ndeni, in the Santa Cruz Islands. Needless to say, these were never carried out, although occupation plans for Ndeni, always involving Marine forces, continue to appear in Admiral Turner's records until October, 1942.

⁶⁴ "It is most desirable that 2d Marines be reinforced and combat unit loaded and ready upon arrival this area for employment in landing operations as a reinforced regimental combat team." *War Diary ComSoPac*, entry 27 June 1942.

combat immediately, no reason could have justified combat-loading at the time of the force's movement to New Zealand from the United States.⁶⁵ Combat loading moreover, would have been made difficult by the fact that most of the vessels used were passenger ships and not specially equipped attack transports.⁶⁶

Almost overnight, however, while the Marines were still enroute, the situation, as we have seen, had changed. An assault operation was now in immediate prospect, and, as a necessary concomitant, it would be essential that the equipment and supplies of the Marine units reached Guadalcanal and Tulagi combat-loaded. Thus, as soon as the troops could be disembarked at New Zealand, the onerous task of unloading, rearranging, and re-loading had to be set on foot and had to be completed at all cost prior to the date set for departure.

Aotea Quay, at Wellington, was the scene of this operation. It was inadequate in all ways save that it could accommodate five ships at a time. Labor difficulties with the highly unionized stevedores—it was not possible to provide the incentive of pointing out that the ships and men in them were about to go into action—resulted in the entire unloading and re-loading task being undertaken and carried through by the Marines. Dock-side equipment was meager, and there was no shelter. Carton-packaged foodstuffs and other supplies deteriorated rapidly in the persistent

⁶⁵ It must not be thought, however, that the importance of combat loading was not fully realized. The following extract from a letter of R. K. Turner (then Assistant Chief of Staff (Plans) under Admiral Stark) to the Commander in Chief, United States Fleet, clearly demonstrates this point.

"It is also recommended that definite decision be made to send to New Zealand the 1st Marine Division, one Marine Defense Battalion, eight combat loaded transports and 3 combat loaded cargo vessels." This letter, having for its subject Command Relations for Pacific Ocean Area, bears no date, but from its place in archives it appears to have been written about 1 April 1942—a time when, of course, there were no plans for specific, immediate offensive.

⁶⁶ Letter, General Vandegrift to CMC 4 February 1949.



ENROUTE TO THE OBJECTIVE, 105mm howitzers of the 5th Battalion, 11th Marines are lashed on deck.

cold windy rain of a "southerly", as did the morale of the men.⁶⁷

The re-loading and reembarking of Combat Group A (5th Marines, reinforced) was accomplished smoothly, uncomplicated by the necessity for literally unloading and reloading at the same time which plagued the operations of the rear echelon. The group was embarked beginning 2 July and remained on board its transports to await the arrival of the rear echelon.⁶⁸

The logistic problem facing the rear echelon was much more severe and complicated. Arriving on 11 July, this group was faced with the necessity of completely emptying and reloading its ships on a dock, to repeat, that was lacking in specialized equipment and in shelter for material that was being sorted. The task, moreover, had to be completed by 22 July.

The problem was solved by what must be regarded as heroic measures. The troops were not disembarked, save those who were to re-

⁶⁷ *Final Report*, Phase I, Annex L.

⁶⁸ *Final Report*, Phase I, p. 6.

main in New Zealand as rear echelon personnel. All others, who already had been in cramped quarters during the long trip across the Pacific, were put to work in eight hour shifts, and work proceeded around the clock. Parties of 300 men were assigned to each ship.⁶⁹

During the process of mounting out, certain modifications of the logistic plan had become necessary. As finally loaded, the Marine force was carrying 60 days supplies, 10 units of fire for all weapons, the minimum individual baggage ". . . actually required to live and fight", and less than half the organic motor transportation authorized for the Division.⁷⁰

Regardless of the difficulties, however, the force sailed as scheduled at 0900 on 22 July, under escort of cruisers of Task Force 62, under command of Admiral Turner.⁷¹ General Vandegrift, despite his request for a vessel better suited in communications and accommodations had been directed to embark his command post on board the USS *McCawley*.

REHEARSALS AND MOVEMENT TO THE OBJECTIVE

In accordance with orders received from Nimitz on 1 July⁷² Ghormley had directed that

⁶⁹ The passage from the United States to New Zealand had been particularly trying for the officers and men on board the *Eriesson*, a commercial ship under charter. Lack of proper food, and use of oil substitutes for shortening, resulted in loss of weight of as high as 23 pounds per man. Two meals only were served during the greater part of the passage, and one of these often consisted of soup, or soup and bread. Medical officers estimated the daily calory content of meals as less than 1500. It bears mention that ship's personnel enjoyed a full and well balanced diet during the same period. *Final Report*, Phase I, Annex M, p. 1.

⁷⁰ Approximately 75 percent of the Division's heavy vehicles were left behind with the rear echelon in New Zealand, while the bulk of the light transportation was carried forward. *Final Report*, Phase I, Annex L.

⁷¹ Admiral Turner assumed the title of Commander, Amphibious Force South Pacific on his arrival in the South Pacific on 24 July, in accordance with instructions, CominCh to distribution list, 7 June and 19 June. NRL.

all forces involved in the assault make rendezvous at a position south of Fiji, out of sight of land so that there would be no chance of observation by enemy agents and no chance that an inadvertent tip-off would be made by friendly observers.⁷³ At that point there would be a conference between the commanding officers of all units involved, who had not as yet been able to discuss in person the various aspects of the coming observation.

The components of the assault force were converging upon the rendezvous point from many directions. The 2d Marines (reinforced), embarked in the *Crescent City*, *President Adams*, *President Hayes*, *President Jackson*, and *Alhena*, had sailed from San Diego on 1 July, under escort of the Carrier *Wasp* and a destroyer screen. The regiment was combat loaded.⁷⁴ The 1st Raider Battalion, in the four destroyer transports of Transport Division 12, had been picked up at Noumea and likewise was approaching the area. The 3d Defense Battalion, on board the USS *Betelgeuse* and *Zeilin*, was en route from Pearl Harbor, where it had been stationed since the outbreak of war, and was destined to meet the remainder of the force on 2 August. The Carrier Force, built around *Saratoga* and *Enterprise*, with Fletcher wearing his flag in the former, likewise was on its way from Pearl Harbor.

Rendezvous was effected as planned, at 1400 on 26 July, at a point 367 miles south of Fiji. The planned conference was held at once on board *Saratoga*, with all interested commanders attending save Ghormley, who was prevented by pressure of business. He was represented by his Chief of Staff, Rear Admiral Daniel J. Callaghan, and his Communications Officer, Lieutenant Commander L. M. LeHardy.

⁷² ⁷³ CinCPac Operation Order 34-42, in *War Diary* CinPac. NRL. By terms of this order also, Fletcher, Commander of Task Force 11, had been ordered to assume command of the combined task forces at the rendezvous, and Ghormley had been put in command of the operation.

⁷⁴ *Ghormley ms.*, p. 64.

⁷⁵ The regiment had been on board since 1 June, lying in the harbor of San Diego.

During the conference, several ominous points were brought out with painful clarity. We have seen that between King and Marshall there had never been a complete agreement and understanding. It became immediately apparent during the meeting on *Saravoga* that this condition existed even within the structure of the task force that had as its mission the carrying out of King's bold plans.

General Vandegrift learned, for the first time, that he had been wrong in assuming that he would have adequate air and surface support for the completion of the landing. His plans had been based upon such an assumption—that there would be enough time to disembark all forces and put ashore all supplies. His concurrent assumption was logical—that air support would be vouchsafed for the transports and the cargo vessels for as long as they might find it necessary to remain, up to four days after the landing.

He had never thought that his division was to be used in what, from Fletcher's point of view, was a hit and run raid. He was put right immediately on that point—the Commander of Task Force 61 planned exactly that type of operation. Callaghan reported to Ghormley that Fletcher considered it feasible to unload all transports during the first day and have them out of the area by nightfall. To unload the cargo vessels might take three or four days. Task Force 61, however, would have to be withdrawn within two days after D-day. It was obvious to Vandegrift, although it was not brought out explicitly, that his forces would thereupon be wide open targets for all the landbased enemy planes within striking distance of the island until such time as the airfield could be completed and planes ferried in to it.

To add to his worries, it seemed more than likely that the newly arrived 2d Marines (reinforced) would not be available to him as a reserve. They were to be used for the occupation of Ndeni, and Turner planned to depart the Tulagi area with them during the evening of D-day. Protests by Colonel DeWitt Peck, that a battalion would be sufficient for the Ndeni mission, were disregarded—the exposed position of Ndeni to thrusts from the

Gilbert Islands area made it necessary that a strong force be used for the occupation. A rough draft of the plan for the occupation was presented—Callaghan thought it very sketchy.⁷⁵

Callaghan also noted that there was confusion in the minds of everyone regarding details of carrier-based air support during the landing, and that the lack of time for proper planning was deplored. Fletcher assured him that any change in his tactical plans desired by Ghormley would be effected at once, and Callaghan gave it as his opinion that Ghormley would not hesitate to do so, although the imposition of radio silence would make it difficult for ComSoPac to keep abreast of the situation. There were insufficient copies of Fletcher's orders and plans, and Ghormley did not see them until some time in September, a month after the operation had begun,⁷⁶ although Fletcher promised to land them at Suva, Fiji, on 31 July, at the conclusion of the rehearsal.

A final point of interest is that immediately before the rehearsals, Major Manly L. Curry, then commanding the 3d Battalion, 10th Marines, was called upon to give a lecture to the assembled gunnery officers of the Fire Support Group of the Amphibious Force. His subject was naval gunfire support, and his observation, based upon the fact that there were no dissensions or questioning of his remarks, was that the subject was new to many of his hearers.⁷⁷

Rehearsals of the landings were held between 28 and 30 July. General Vandegrift's opinion was that they resulted only in a waste of time and effort—⁷⁸ "A complete bust," he subsequently observed.⁷⁹ Necessity for conserving landing craft made it impossible to conduct the practice landings in a realistic way, although the men involved were given

⁷⁵ All details of the conference have been taken from rough notes given Ghormley by Callaghan upon Callaghan's return to Auckland. They are included in full in Admiral Ghormley's manuscript.

⁷⁶ *Ghormley ms.*, pp. 64 and 69.

⁷⁷ Interview, Col. M. L. Curry, 28 January, 1949.

⁷⁸ *Final Report*, Phase V, p. 2.

⁷⁹ Statement at Princeton, N. J., 12 March 1948.

additional training in debarkation.⁸⁰ Attack force ships also were able to practice the type of gunfire support they would be called upon to render.

On 31 July, as night was falling, the ships weighed anchor and departed from Koro, the Carrier Task Force proceeding north and west, while the transports and their screen plodded steadily toward the Solomons. Almost 19,000 Marines were embarked in the 19 transports and four destroyer-transport.⁸¹

All circumstances favored the advancing convoy. In the words of the Final Action Report:

Weather conditions during the final two days of the approach were extremely favorable. The sky was generally overcast with low ceiling and intermittent rain squalls. There were no signs of hostile reconnaissance aircraft or submarines, and nothing indicated that our approach had been observed.

Fortune smiled upon the Marines more benignly than they realized. Enemy patrol planes were grounded at Rabaul on 5 and 6 August because of bad weather.⁸²

Later in the campaign, it was found that actually there had been some idea on the part of the Japanese that there would be an attack on their positions sometime in July or August,⁸³ but it is not clear, from the document whence this information was taken by our translators, whether this was merely a shrewd guess on the part of the enemy, or whether it was in fact based on definite information.

⁸⁰ General Vandegrift noted at the time that the precious landing craft were not in the best of condition in any event — 12 of them were inoperative on one ship alone. Letter, General Vandegrift to Commandant Marine Corps, 4 February 1949.

⁸¹ A total and seemingly irreconcilable discrepancy of figures between those of the Amphibious Force, South Pacific, and the 1st Marine Division, prevents a wholly accurate statement as to the number of troops embarked then or landed subsequently. Inasmuch as the Marine figures, contained in the division's Final Action Report, are not only themselves internally contradictory but of much later date than those of the Amphibious Force, it is probable that the latter are more nearly correct, and that 18,722 is close to the mark. On the other hand, however, the division records list, variously, 19,546 or 19,105.

⁸² Letter, Commander James Shaw, USN, to author, February 1949.

If the enemy had definite information about the impending strike, it is hard to understand his careless security, for the task force reached the objective area apparently without having been observed in any way, and during the last three days of the approach it was within range of aerial observation.

The course chosen took the convoy generally west from Fiji and well to the south of the Solomons chain.⁸⁴ The course gradually shifted to the northward, and the night of 6-7 August found the entire group of ships, due west of the western extremity of Guadalcanal.

Task Force 62, commanded by Rear Admiral R. K. Turner, was divided into two Transport Groups. Transport Group X-ray (62.1) commanded by Captain Reifsnider, with the Guadalcanal forces embarked, consisted of four subgroups, as follows:

Transdiv A: *Fuller, American Legion, Bellatrix.*

Transdiv B: *McCawley, Barnett, Elliot, Libra.*

Transdiv C: *Hunter Liggett, Alchiba, Fomalhaut, Betelgeuse.*

Transdiv D: *Crescent City, President Hayes, President Adams, Athena.*

Transport Group Yoke (62.2) commanded by Captain Ashe and carrying the assault troops for the Tulagi landing, consisted of the following subgroups:

Transdiv E: *Neville, Zeilin, Heywood, President Jackson.*

Transdiv 12: *Calhoun, Gregory, Little, McKean* (the destroyer transport group).⁸⁵

⁸³ Captain Eugene P. Boardman, in a manuscript in his possession, says that this information was circulated among the Japanese in an intelligence document during July 1942. His statement was based upon prison-of-war interrogations conducted by himself on the spot. Boardman was assistant R-2 (Language) officer with the 2d Marines. Intelligence Memorandum #5, 23 June 1943. *Enemy Operations on Guadalcanal 7 August 1942 to 9 February 1943*. Captain John A. Burden.

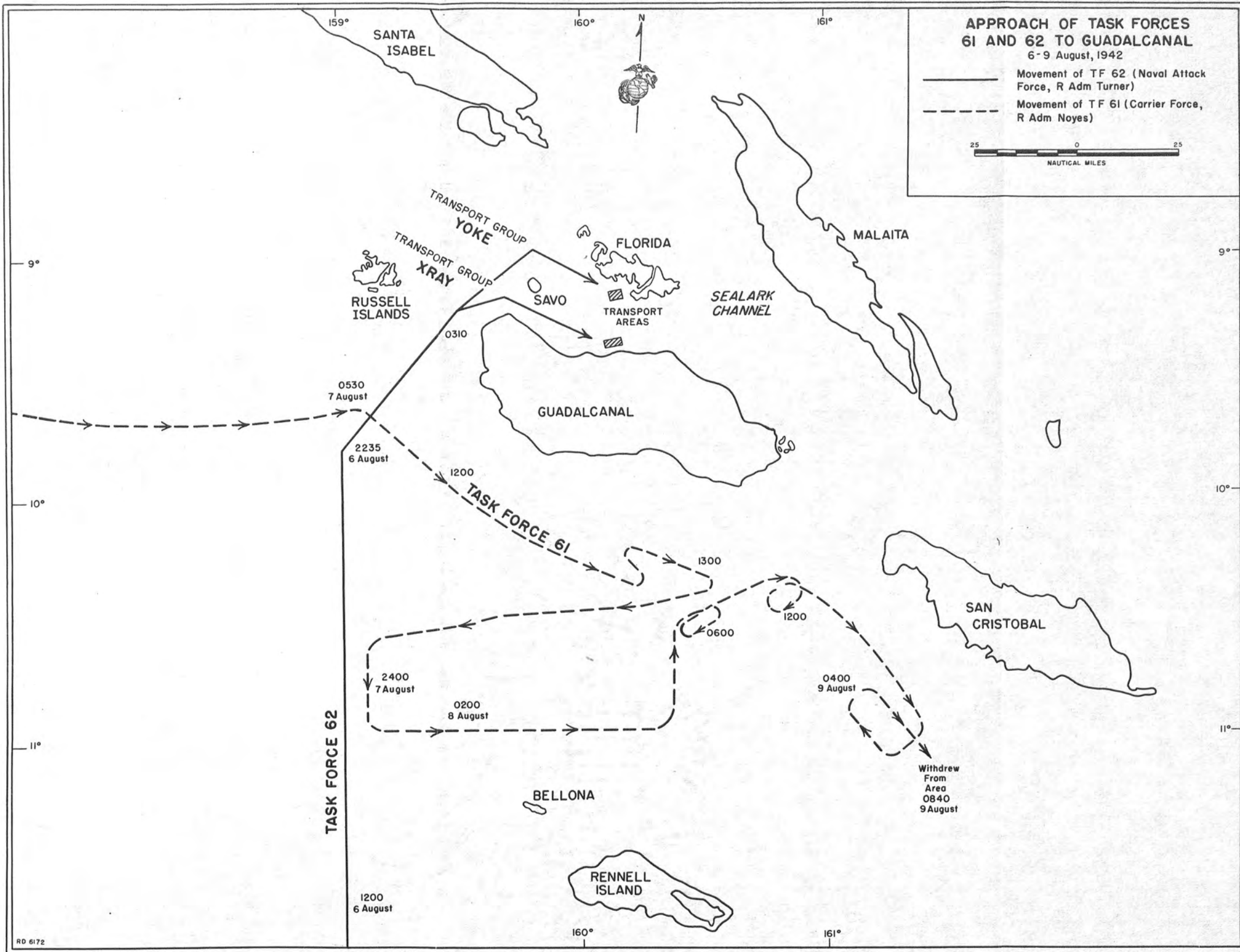
⁸⁴ *Final Report*, Phase I, p. 9.

⁸⁵ Operation Plan A3-42, 30 July 42 — CTF62, in Marine Corps Records.

APPROACH OF TASK FORCES 61 AND 62 TO GUADALCANAL

6-9 August, 1942

- Movement of TF 62 (Naval Attack Force, R Adm Turner)
- - - Movement of TF 61 (Carrier Force, R Adm Noyes)



At 0310, 7 August, the force was in position directly west of Cape Esperance, in two groups, with an interval of six miles and a speed of 12 knots, Transport Group X-ray itself was divided in two parallel columns, of eight and seven ships respectively with a distance of 750 yards between ships and an interval of 1,000 yards between columns. The shadowy rugged outline of the hills was just visible to starboard as the course was shifted to 040°, and a few minutes later the two groups separated for the completion of their missions. X-ray, shifting still further to starboard, settled on course 075°, which took it down the coast and parallel to it, while Yoke, on course 058°, crossed outside Savo Island, across a stretch of water that was later to be

the scene of bitter surface engagements and where, a few hours later, four Allied cruisers were to be destroyed by a brilliant and daring strike by the enemy.⁸⁶

It seems incredible that such a force should have been able to approach the landing beach undetected, but it is a fact that no signs of life came from the shore as the convoy ran down the coast. The final approach to the transport area was made without incident, and there was no sound until, at 0614, the supporting ships opened fire on the island.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ *Report of Action, 7-9 August*, Commander, Task Group 62, 1, p. 3. MCR.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 3.



THE GUADALCANAL CAMPAIGN

CHAPTER II

Landings on Tulagi and Gavutu-Tanambogo

TULAGI. THE FIRST DAY

TASK GROUP 62.2 separated from the larger body of ships at 0240¹ and approached Tulagi, its objective, over an independent course. The approach was accomplished without incident, the only departure from mechanical perfection being a failure on the part of the transports to keep closed up in formation. All elements of the group arrived in position at about 0630,² and word came from Captain George B. Ashe, USN, commander of the Task Group stationed in *Neville*, that H-hour would be 0800.

As the ships approached the transport area, it was seen that the missions assigned to Support Group planes were being carried out. Strafing of designated areas (by Flight #101, 15 fighter planes, from *Wasp*) took place at

¹ *Final Report, Phase I*, p. 9.

² "0625 — Enemy surface force of 20 ships has entered Tulagi. While making landing preparations, the enemy is bombarding the shore." Message from Tulagi Communication Base, 7 August 1942. (25th Air Flotilla War Diary) — Washington Document Center 161730.

³ *Report, Commander, Wasp Air Group to Commanding Officer, USS Wasp*, 10 August 1942. In general, during the first day *Wasp* planes operated over the Tulagi area while *Saratoga* planes gave comparable support to the main landing off Beach Red at Guadalcanal. *Enterprise* planes gave protection to the carriers and flew patrol missions.

⁴ *Report, Commander Cruisers Task Force 18*, p. 1. "0630 — All flying boats have been set afire by the bombardment." WDC 161730.

0614, and dive bombing (by Flight #102, 15 dive bombers, from the same ship) was underway at 0618.³ Fires were observed in the target area—seaplanes in the harbor, caught like sitting ducks, had been set afire.⁴

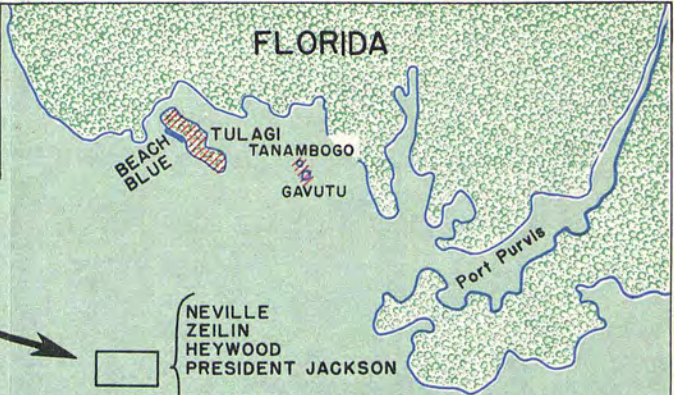
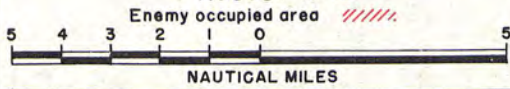
Naval gunfire preparation began with 5-inch fire from the destroyer *Monssen*, directed at a hill on a promontory of Florida Island, west of Tulagi, in the vicinity of the scene of the 2d Marines' first landing (see below). Sixty rounds were expended on the target between 0727 and 0732. In the meantime, both *Buchanan* and *San Juan* (an anti-aircraft cruiser) were pumping 100 rounds each into nearby targets, the former concentrating on another point of land east of Haleta, also on Florida Island, while *San Juan* directed its attention to a small island directly south of the same point of land.⁵

The first landing of the operation was carried out at 0740, 20 minutes before H-hour. In order to protect the left flank of the force executing the Tulagi landing, Company B (reinforced) of the 2d Marines, under command of Captain Edgar J. Crane, landed at that time on Florida near Haleta. The landing was unopposed, although enemy troops had been reported in position there on 25 July.⁶ Crane, whose force consisted of Company B, the 4th platoon of Company D, and 21 enlisted personnel from Headquarters Company, all of

⁵ *Report, Commander Cruisers, Task Force 18*, p. 2.

⁶ *Japanese Dispositions and Defense Installations, Tulagi-Guadalcanal area*. ComSoPac, 25 July 1942.

**GUADALCANAL - TULAGI
OBJECTIVE AREA
7 AUGUST 1942**



TRANSPORT GROUP
YOKE

- NEVILLE
 - ZEILIN
 - HEYWOOD
 - PRESIDENT JACKSON
-
- COL HOUN
 - GREGORY
 - LITTLE
 - McKEAN

N

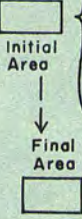
TRANSPORT GROUP
XRAY

- HUNTER LIGGETT
- ALCHIBA
- FOMALHAUT
- BETELGEUSE
- CRESCENT CITY
- PRESIDENT HAYES
- PRESIDENT ADAMS
- ALHENA
- FULLER
- AMERICAN LEGION
- BELLATRIX
- McCAWLEY
- BARNETT
- ELLIOTT
- LIBRA

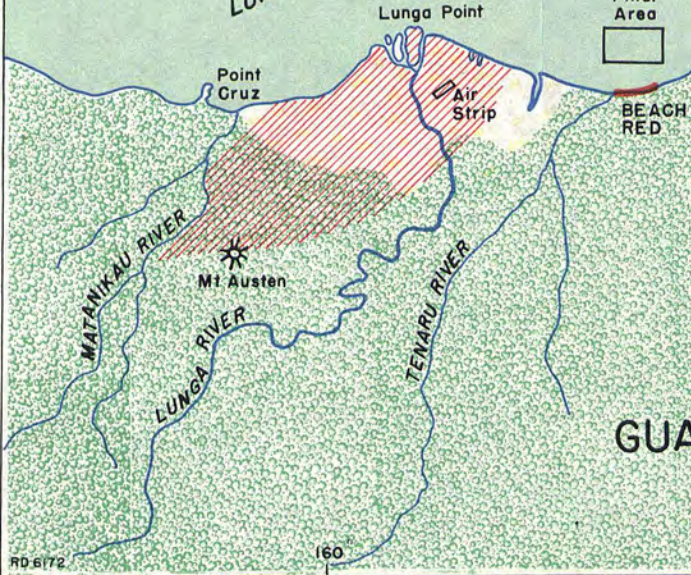
SEALARK
CHANNEL

9°20'

9°20'



LUNGA ROADS



GUADALCANAL

1st Battalion, 2d Marines, was on his objective within 40 minutes. The 252 officers and men had come ashore in eight landing boats, and had been guided to their objective by one of the several Australians on duty with the division.⁷

The main objective, the island of Tulagi, was attacked exactly on schedule. At 0800, under cover of gunfire from *San Juan* and under destroyers *Monssen* and *Buchanan* (Fire Support Group *Mike*) the 1st Raider Battalion went ashore, followed by the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines.⁸ The landing was made at Beach Blue, 2000 yards from the northwestern end of the island on the western shore.

The island of Tulagi is a long, narrow, hilly, heavily wooded mass surrounded on three sides by extensive coral beds. It is approximately 4000 yards in extreme length and 1000 yards wide at its greatest width, which is fairly constant throughout the length of the island. Its long axis lies roughly in a northwest-southeast direction, and a regular, wooded ridge, 350 feet high, runs lengthwise through the northwestern two-thirds of the island. A smaller southeastern ridge presents a much less regular appearance and is separated from the other by a saddle which forms a sort of corridor between them, running directly across the island. Most of the development of the island was centered in the southeastern section around the coastline and in the corridor itself.

The island had been the seat of the British Solomon Islands Government, and the installations on it consisted of numerous wharves along the northeastern coast, a radio station, a prison, hospital, and other government buildings.

The character of the coast-line of the island presented a problem to those who had planned the landing. The only beaches which seemed to be suitable were those on the eastern and southeastern coast, and these were so dominated by high ground as to make an assault

landing in the face of determined resistance an extremely precarious operation. It was finally decided to go ashore on the western coast of the island about 2,000 yards below the northwestern extremity, near the site of a small native cemetery. A map, now in Marine Corps Records, used in preparing the original plan shows the shore line in this vicinity to be badly overgrown with coral, and a notation regarding this growth appears on the map with the following wording: "Bordered with coral reefs. Due to uncertain tides landing not practical except amphibian tanks or rubber boats."

It is not unlikely that the enemy took the same view of the beach characteristics, for the landing here, as on Florida, was made without opposition. The report of one man falling before the fire of a single enemy rifleman, arose from the fact that one man of the Intelligence Section, 1st Raider Battalion, was killed by an accidental discharge while still aboard *Little*. He was brought ashore for burial.⁹

As the first waves approached the beach, the accuracy of the description of the coral beds was demonstrated. Not a single landing craft reached the beach. All of them hung up on coral formations at distances varying from 30 to well over 100 yards from the water line, and the assault personnel waded ashore through water initially from waist to armpit depth.¹⁰

By this time, the enemy defense forces (later found to be concentrated in the southeastern third of the island) realized that an all-out assault was under way, and not merely an air and surface force raid. Between 0725 and 0749, the Tulagi Communication Base was notifying the Commanding Officer of the 25th Air Flotilla at Rabaul that Tulagi was under bombardment, that the landings had begun, and that the senders were destroying all equipment immediately in view of the situ-

⁷ Interview, Majors Houston Stiff, John B. Sweeney, and William E. Sperling, 4 February 1949. Letter, Major Henry J. Adams to Commandant Marine Corps, 17 December 1948.

¹⁰ *Loc. cit.* and interview, Major John C. Erskine, 15 March 1949.

⁷ Letter, LtCol H. R. Thorpe to Commandant Marine Corps, 19 January 1949. See also *Final Report*, Phase II, p. 2.

⁸ *Final Report*, Phase II, page 2.

ation. At 0800 the messages said that shells were falling near the radio installation. Ten minutes later, the final and prophetic message went out—"Enemy troop strength is overwhelming. We will defend to the last man."¹¹

By this time, Companies B and D, of the 1st Raider Battalion, had just reached the beach and were to begin movement inland. There had been no opposition to the landing. Company B, reinforced, 2d Marines, was already on its objective on the Florida mainland southwest of Tulagi, likewise having met no opposition. The landing craft carrying Companies A and C, 1st Raiders, were beginning to hang up on the coral, and Company E, whose 60mm mortars had been attached to the rifle companies¹² was on the way in to assume responsibility for beachhead security.

The terrain immediately behind the beach dictated the tactics employed. As Marines crossed the narrow beach and entered the undergrowth that bordered it, they faced a steep coral slope, also heavily wooded. This was the southwestern slope of the 350-foot ridge that runs along the length of the island in almost an unbroken wall. The two companies pushed ahead and across the ridge, Company B continued down the slope and occupied, without opposition, a small native village called Sasapi, on the opposite shore of the island. The company then swung to the right preparatory to beginning the advance toward the southeast. Company D, in the meanwhile, had swung right immediately after crossing the ridge line and likewise was ready to begin the advance, with its right flank on the ridge. For the rest of the day this formation was maintained, namely, Company D with its right flank on the crest line, its left flank in contact with Company B. Company B, in turn, was echeloned to the left rear with its left flank on the water's edge. The advance of these two companies was steady and without opposition until B

¹¹ WDC 161730. Excerpt translation in Marine Corps records.

¹² Interview, Stiff, Sweeney, and Sperling, 4 February 1949.

Company reached Carpenter's Wharf, half-way down the east shore of the island, where it encountered a series of enemy outposts.¹³

In the meantime, the remaining companies of the Raider Battalion had come ashore. Colonel Edson, delayed by a breakdown in the boat which was bringing him ashore, did not reach the beach until the initial movement (see below) down the ridge had begun.¹⁴ Companies A and C, comprising the second wave, followed closely upon the first wave and in turn were followed by Company E.

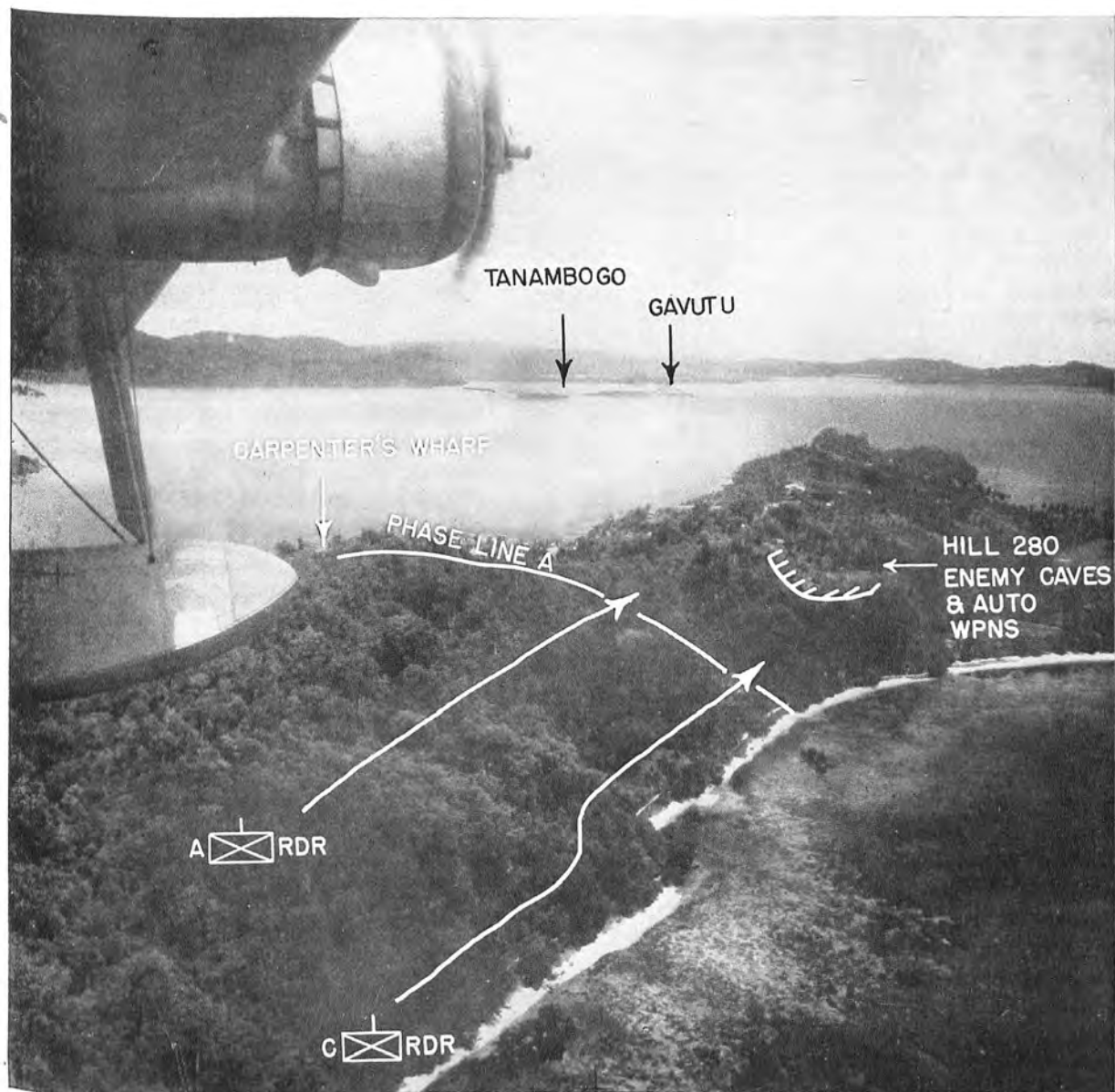
Company A, following the path of the leading companies, swung right immediately after reaching the crest of the ridge, tying in on the left with Company D. Company C, keeping its right flank on the beach, also swung right, tying in on the left with the right flank elements of Company A and echeloning itself to the right rear of that company. Company E, meanwhile, remained at Beach Blue and provided beachhead security. The progress of Companies A and C to the southeast was comparable to that of the companies to the left—no opposition was met until Phase Line A was reached at 1120.¹⁵

Progress had been steady in all portions of the line. Colonel Edson by this time had reached shore and had caught up with his advancing units, and was ready to begin an attack to the southeast. Fronting him was the more thickly settled portion of the island where the British Government activities of the Solomons had been centered. This area lay in a saddle between the two ridges of the island—the larger one to the northwest, which had just been swept by the advancing Raiders, and a smaller rugged hill mass that

¹³ *Final Report*, Phase II, p. 2.

¹⁴ Interview, Stiff, Sweeney, and Sperling, 4 February 1949.

¹⁵ *Final Report*, Phase II, Annex D, p. 1. The term "Phase Line A", unexplained in reports, was used to describe the well defined line running across the southeastern slope of the northwestern ridge where the jungle growth of the ridge gave way to the cultivated area of the Government Station—the line that separates the jungle from the sown. Interview, Stiff, Sweeney, and Sperling, 4 February 1949.



ADVANCE ALONG TULAGI was executed during the morning of 7 August by Col Edson's 1st Raider Battalion as shown in this overprinted photograph. Phase Line A was in Marine hands by 1120.

formed the spine of the southeastern end of the island.¹⁶

Up to this time, radio communication be-

¹⁶ The Raiders had been well briefed on the terrain of the island by Lieutenant Henry E. Josselyn, RANR, a former resident of the area who had intimate knowledge of it. Major John B. Sweeney, in an interview on 4 February 1949, gave it as his opinion that the men of the battalion could have found their way over the island in total darkness, so lucid and vivid had the briefing been.

tween Edson and Brigadier General William A. Rupertus, the Assistant Division Commander (whose Command Post was still afloat) had been satisfactory. Fighting along the ridge had been sporadic and never severe, although a number of isolated individual enemy troops had been bypassed during the advance.¹⁷ So successful had the action been

¹⁷ *Record of Events, Tulagi* (General Rupertus' report), entries for 7 August.

that Group Air Commander, Tulagi (flying from *Wasp*), reported from observation that Marines could be seen over the entire island. At 1404 he reported, most erroneously, that there was no opposition.¹⁸

At 1120, as we have seen, Phase Line A was reached and Edson was ready to advance. Preparatory to movement toward the saddle and the hills beyond it, fire was laid down on the area by all weapons of the battalion, save only the machine guns of Company E, which was still in position at Beach Blue. A noisy demonstration, this fire had no discernible effect.¹⁹

Radio communication between Rupertus and Edson began to deteriorate immediately after the Raider Battalion reached the Phase Line. Thereafter, throughout the afternoon, the Assistant Division Commander knew only that the advance was progressing—he lacked immediate current details.

Actually, the first serious resistance of the operation developed almost as the lines began to move forward. Immediately to the front of Company C, on the extreme right flank position, there arose a knob like hill (Hill 208) forward and independent of the ridge which had just been swept. As the right flank elements of the company began to pass between the beach and the seaward face of the hill, 200 yards inland, they were taken under fire from automatic weapons emplaced on the face of the hill and from rifles. The situation was developed, and after an hour of fighting Company C cleared out the enemy positions by rifle fire and grenades.

Farther to the east, at the same time, the rest of Edson's force was likewise meeting opposition. As Company C was engaged in neutralizing Hill 208, Edson asked for, and received, naval gunfire against the southeastern ridge (Hill 281).²⁰ *San Juan* complied

¹⁸ *D-3 Journal, 1st Marine Division*. Message 73 for 7 August.

¹⁹ Interview, Stiff, Sweeney, and Sperling, 4 February 1949.

²⁰ *Report, Commander, Cruisers, Task Force 18*. Two Naval Gunfire Officers were on duty at Edison's Headquarters — Lieutenants (j.g.) Aida and Carlin. Letter, Lt A. L. Moon, USNR, to LtCol R. D. Heintz, Jr., 13 February 1949.

with his request, made at 1240, laying down a seven minute, 280 round concentration of 5-inch shells on the designated target.

Four hours later, at 1625, Edson was able to notify Rupertus that 500 enemy had broken contact with his force and had withdrawn toward Hill 281, the southeastern ridge.

The advance continued slowly until dusk. By that time Company E, relieved of its mission of providing beachhead security by the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines (see below), had reported to its parent organization. Company D, on the extreme left flank, had met no opposition since midmorning, when it had flushed out the first resisting enemy encountered, near Carpenter's Wharf. This company had pushed south along the eastern beach and had got to the ridge line of Hill 281. Company B, now operating on the right of Company D, had likewise been able to advance without resistance until, just at dusk, it lost contact on the left with Company D and found itself in position on high ground overlooking a cut through which ran a cross-island roadway. Company D, on the far side of the road and to the left of B, went into position for the night with its right flank resting on the southern brink of the cut. Company B, with elements of Headquarters Company, rested its left flank on the cut and extended its lines generally westward along the brink.²¹ Both companies put out listening posts at intervals forward of the lines.

Companies A and C (less one platoon), meanwhile, had come squarely against a terrain feature that harbored the only serious resistance on the island. On the northwest slope of Hill 281 there was a deep ravine, running approximately east and west, which opened to the west, several hundred yards south of Hill 280. The long axis of the ravine, therefore, lay parallel to the advancing lines of the two companies. Its sides were precipitous, and within it the enemy had prepared positions which made an assault into it through the mouth possible only at the risk of high casualties. Maps that had been cap-

²¹ Interview, Stiff, Sweeney, and Sperling, 4 February 1949.

tured and translated during the day confirmed that the ravine would contain the core of enemy resistance.²²

Further action against the pocket was impossible at the time, and all elements of the battalion went into position for the night. Company D, on the left, was disposed as explained above, save that its flank elements were bent back to the beach to refuse the left flank. On the right, out of physical contact and separated from it by a cut, was Company B, with a part of Headquarters Company attached. Company E, which had reported to Edson late in the afternoon, was placed on Company B's right, while Companies A and C (less one platoon), respectively, were in position to the right of E Company and in contact with it. Their position ran along high ground facing the ravine and parallel to its long axis. Companies E, C, and A likewise put out listening posts.²³

While Edson's battalion had been sweeping southeast down the island, another unit had come ashore. The 2d Battalion, 5th Marines (Rosecrans), had landed at 0916—a total of 1085 officers and men. The initial mission was to sweep the northwest portion of the island, which had as yet received no attention. The command post was established west of Beach Blue.

The battalion was committed piecemeal to various tasks. The northwest section of the island was swept by Company F, which reported no opposition. At 1000 Company E was ordered to operate generally in support of Company B (Raiders), and one hour later, the 3d Platoon of Company H (Weapons) was ordered forward to assist Company C (Raiders) in the latter's attack against Hill 208. By 1300, when the Raider Battalion had begun its movement forward from Phase Line A, Company G was ordered to go down the trail along the ridge line and report to Edson for duty in support of the Raider Battalion. The command post of Rosecrans' battalion was established first at Beach Blue,

²² *Final Report*, Phase II, p. 3.

²³ Interview, Stiff, Sweeney, and Sperling, 4 February 1949.



EDSON'S COMMAND POST, the former British Residency on Tulagi, was established on the afternoon of 7 August. This view looks north toward Florida Island hills on skyline.

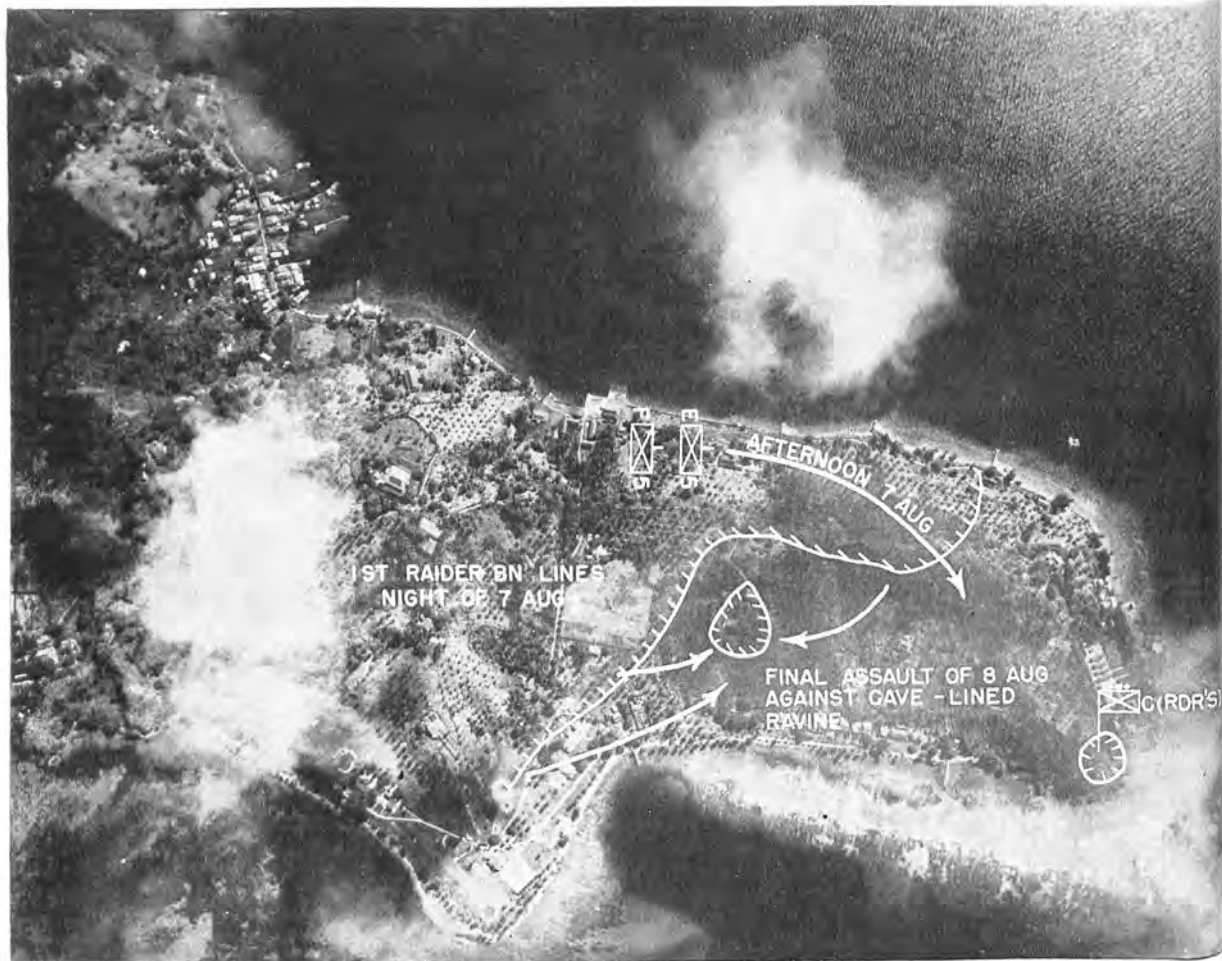
later in the day moving southeast toward the scene of action of the Raider Battalion.²⁴

TULAGI. THE FIRST NIGHT AND SUCCEEDING DAY

The first night on Tulagi set the pattern for many nights in the Pacific War's future, for the devices employed by the enemy then were those he was to follow with an almost religious singleness of mind. Four separate attacks were launched against the Raiders' lines, and although minor penetrations occurred, in none of them did the enemy show signs of having thought beyond the mere fact of penetration. No attempt was made to consolidate the gains, and no evidence could be found that the Japanese attempted to exploit them.

Nightfall found the Marines holding positions as shown on the accompanying map. It will be seen that the Raiders' line followed the high ground around the ravine which, in the closing hours of the day, had proved to be the major obstacle to a complete cleanup of the island. One platoon of Company C was isolated, but not in trouble, on the southeastern tip of the island where, after having pushed ahead along the beach and having become separated from its parent company, it had established a small perimeter for the night. Company D, facing west with its line running

²⁴ *Final Report*, Phase II, Annex L, p. 4.



FINAL ASSAULTS ON TULAGI were delivered by elements of 1st Raider Battalion and 2d Battalion, 5th Marines, as shown on overprint. Photograph was taken by Navy carrier-planes during strike of 4 May.

from the cross-island road up into the ridge line and back, on the left, until its left flank rested on the beach, was attenuated, but was not threatened. Company B, with elements of Headquarters Company attached, Company E, Company A, and Company C (less one platoon) were in position in that order from left to right, with Company C's right flank elements resting on the beach. These four companies, closer to and facing the enemy pocket, enjoyed a degree of protection from the fact that the ridge which they occupied dominated the enemy positions. They had, as we have seen, a line of forward positions in the form of a series of listening posts.²⁵ The Raider Battalion command post had been set up at the Residency, formerly

occupied by the Resident Commissioner, about two hundred yards north of the Company E sector.

Elements of the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines were disposed to the rear of the Raiders' positions.

The first enemy attack—and one of the two that had some initial success—was driven home between Companies C and A. Forward positions were thrown back into company lines, and the two companies were forced apart. Company C was isolated from the rest of the battalion by the attack, but was not molested further. Company A refused its

²⁵ Information on dispositions for the night was obtained in the Stiff, Sweeney, and Sperling Interview, 4 February 1949.

dangling right flank, and awaited developments.

They were not long in coming. Shifting the direction of his attack toward his right front, the enemy force attempted to roll back Company A. The refused flank held, and no penetration was affected, 26 enemy being killed within 20 yards of the company's line.²⁶

That was the last concerted attack of the night. Thereafter, enemy efforts consisted entirely of attempts at quiet infiltration of the Marine positions. Individuals and small groups worked their way from the ravine, through the lines, and launched five separate small scale attacks against the command post at the Residency between 0030 and 0530. These were repulsed without trouble. Efforts on the part of two other groups to make their way up the beaches past the extreme flanks of Companies D, on the east, and C, on the west, likewise were turned back.²⁷

On the morning of 8 August, two companies of the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines, were moved into position to assist in the sweep of the southwestern part of the island. Companies E and F of that battalion went into position on the northeastern slopes of the Hill 281 after passing through Company D of the Raider Battalion. From that take off position they swept across the hill, down the

southwestern slope, and swung right, moving toward the enemy pocket in the ravine.²⁸

The troublesome terrain feature was now flanked on three sides, and the Marines were able to lay down a heavy concentration of mortar shells from the 60mm weapons of the Raiders and the more destructive 81mm mortars of the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines. By midafternoon the preparation was complete, and at 1500 the Raiders attacked from the northwest, aided by Company G, 5th Marines, and pushed through the ravine, wiping out all enemy resistance. For several days there was recurrent activity as isolated individual enemy riflemen and small groups of them were flushed out of their hiding places and hunted down. Organized resistance was over with the elimination of the enemy force in the ravine, however, and Tulagi had been retaken by the American forces by nightfall of 8 August.

THE LANDINGS ON GAVUTU—TANAMBOGO

These Siamese twin islets, each a small, flat affair dominated by a low, precipitous central hill of coral, were ligatured by a causeway 500 yards in length. The hill on Gavutu—148 feet in height and therefore named Hill 148—was slightly higher than its companion on Tanambogo which rose only 121 feet. This difference in height, catalyzed by the military rule of thumb which says that high ground dominates low ground, was a central factor in the making of plans for the assault.

The plans,²⁹ in short, called for a landing on the northeast coast of Gavutu,³⁰ with the landing craft coming in from the east. Since

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

²⁷ Operation Order No. 7-42. See *Final Report*, Phase II, Annex E, p. 2.

²⁸ The importance of Gavutu arose from the fact that there were numerous installations on the islet, including machine shops, jetties, and a radio station. The headquarters of Levers Pacific Plantations Proprietary, Limited, the great copra growing concern, was also located there. *Sailing Direction for the Pacific Islands*. Vol. I, p. 323. (Issued by the Hydrographic Office, Navy Department, in 1938. H. O. No. 165.)

²⁶ *Final Report*, Phase II, pp. 3 and 4.

²⁷ *Final Report*, Phase II, p. 4.



JAPANESE SEAPLANE ANCHORAGE, GAVUTU-TANAMBOGO, as posted for convenience of pilots, was well punctured by small arms fire. Tanambogo is on the left, Gavutu, the right. Islet at the top is Gaomi.

Tanambogo lies approximately north of Gavutu and less than 1000 yards away, it can be seen that, granting the presence of enemy on Tanambogo, the assault force would meet with flanking fire as well as frontal resistance. Opposition from both directions would come from terrain which dominated the flat beach by virtue of height.

The assault itself was to be carried out by two companies of the Parachute Battalion, with a third company of the same battalion being kept in reserve initially for employment in support of the assault companies. Companies A and B, landing in that order, would attack the north and southeast faces of Hill 148 respectively, while Company C, plus attachments, would land last, go into position to the right (north) of the landing beach around the Gavutu end of the causeway. From this position it was expected that Company C would be able to offer assistance in the assault by interdicting the flanking fire from Tanambogo. When Gavutu was secured, Company C was to reembark, pass to Tanambogo, and seize that island.³¹

Naval gunfire support was to be provided, as was close-in support from planes—SBD's from the carrier *Wasp*. It was expected that these two types of support would neutralize or eliminate entirely enemy emplacements on the hills. Gunfire would be effective, of course, only to the extent that the shells could reach the emplacements—those lying in defilade would be immune to damage. It was this type of protection that the dive-bombers were expected to overcome. A hardly foreseeable detail, and one that was destined to remain a major problem for Marine

³¹ Letter, Major Charles A. Miller to Commandant, Marine Corps, 9 February 1949. It bears mentioning here that the Parachute Battalion was a far smaller unit than its rifle regiment counterpart. Composed of four rather than five companies, its total strength was but 351 men, armed with Reising sub-machine guns, '03 rifles, Browning automatic rifles, and, in the case of three men, with Johnson automatic rifles. Light machine guns and 60mm mortars completed the battalions armament. Each of its rifle companies had but 102 men—one of them, Company C, had only 77. See also letter, Colonel Justin G. Duryea to Commandant Marine Corps, 17 January 1949.

assault troops for the next two years of the war, was the coral cave. It began to appear as a troublesome obstacle for the Parachute Battalion at about the same time as the Raider Battalion, on Tulagi, was recognizing it as such.

There was to be no possibility of surprise. The hour for assault was set in General Vandegrift's Operation Order No. 7-42 as H plus four hours. Four hours after the Raider Battalion's landing on Tulagi (at a spot estimated to lie well away from the enemy's prepared positions) the Parachute Battalion was to make a frontal assault in the face of fire from an alerted garrison, which was supported by fires from a flanking position.

The battalion went ashore in three waves, one company per wave. The thoroughness with which *San Juan* had carried out her fire support mission—280 rounds of 8-inch fire against Gavutu in four minutes³²—and the intensity of the divebombing preparation³³ caused heavy damage to the enemy installation. So completely had the island been blanketed, indeed, that the destruction worked to the disadvantage of the Parachute Battalion. For whereas the unit had intended to land on a seaplane ramp where it would be easy to get ashore, it was found that this installation had been reduced to an unusable mass of rubble. The landing craft therefore were forced to land slightly to the north and were exposed even more to flanking fire.³⁴ Part of the troops had to scramble over a concrete pier standing four feet out of the water and exposed to fire from both islands. General Vandegrift estimated that ten percent casualties were suffered by the troops landing in the area.³⁵

Company A, comprising the first wave, got ashore without casualties and began working inland without serious opposition. Four minutes later, the four-boat wave carrying Company B came in. This wave, however, and the final wave, carrying Company C and

³² *Action Report*, Commander, Task Force 18, p. 2.

³³ From flights 102, 106, 109, 112, 303, 305, 312, and 315, all from *Wasp*. All planes involved were SBD's. *Action Report*, USS *Wasp*.

³⁴ *Final Report*, Phase II, p. 5.

³⁵ *Ibid*, p. 5.

miscellaneous attachments, which followed it seven minutes later, were brought under fire immediately upon coming within range, during their approach, and during the landing. Company B, moving off to the left to work its way toward the southern end of the island, soon found itself partially protected from enemy fire, the greater part of which came from the northern face of Hill 148 (protected from naval gunfire by its position in defilade) and from Tanambogo. This company therefore continued to move.

The remaining companies, however, were by now under heavy fire that pinned them down. Within 20 minutes of the time the first landing craft touched the beach, Major Robert H. Williams was wounded, and command passed to Major Charles A. Miller, his Executive Officer.³⁶ On the part of these two companies, movement was impossible until Company B worked its way into position to offer support with small arms and mortar fire.

By 1430, the battalion found itself in possession of the greater part of the island. Hill 148, the dominant terrain feature, had been assaulted on the east and the southeast. It had been possible to bring naval gunfire to bear on those slopes, and enemy resistance was thereby lessened to the extent that emplacements could be overrun. The southwest and west slopes, however, were to some extent in defilade, while the north and northeast faces of the hill were protected by flanking fire from Tanambogo. Fire from well protected emplacements on the Tanambogo side of the island continued to impede the movements of part of the already depleted battalion and to inflict further casualties upon it.³⁷ Miller realized that Tanambogo must be

³⁶ Letter, Miller to CMC, 9 February 1949. Miller says that Williams was not found until after dusk.

³⁷ An unfortunate blow to the understrength battalion fell when elements of Company B, Parachute Battalion, had just succeeded in working their way to the top of Hill 148. At the moment, one of the supporting aircraft, an SBD, placed a bomb of undetermined size squarely upon the summit of the hill. This mistake in target identification cost the company two men killed and several wounded. A similar error caused more casualties next day in the same spot.

reduced. He also realized that he must have reinforcements in order to accomplish this, and he requested them.³⁸

In anticipation of their arrival, Miller also requested that an airstrike and naval gunfire be laid down on Tanambogo. In compliance with the request, *Wasp* planes furnished a ten minute strike, and *Buchanan* and *Monsen*, in position south of Gavutu, fired over that island and subjected the exposed faces of the hill on Tanambogo to an intense concentration of 5-inch shell fire.

By this time all forces available to General Rupertus had been committed. On Tulagi the 1st Raider Battalion, reinforced by elements of the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines, was compressing the enemy into the ravine and was getting into the positions which it would hold for the night. Other elements of the 5th Marines were likewise carrying out special missions — Company E, operating near Sasapi, on the northeast coast of Tulagi, was about to be returned to the beachhead to provide security, and Company F was patrolling in the upper third of the island. The 1st Battalion, 2d Marines, (less Company B) operating without its supporting elements, had met with no opposition since landing near Halavo, opposite Gavutu on Florida Island. Company B, having carried out its mission of a pre-H-hour support landing opposite Beach Blue, likewise had made no contact with Japanese forces and was about to be withdrawn from the area.

Rupertus had not been informed by Miller of the number of reinforcements he needed. He therefore ordered Company B, by radio, to report to Miller on Gavutu for further employment. The message reached Company B as it was preparing to enter the landing craft (LCP's) that had been sent to take it off the island.³⁹

The company, embarked in six landing craft, reported to Miller at about 1800 and was directed to land on Tanambogo and seize that island. Crane was told that the island was held by a few snipers. The landing craft,

³⁸ *Final Report*, Phase II, p. 5.

³⁹ Letter, LtCol Wood B. Kyle to Commandant Marine Corps, 10 February 1949.

badly overcrowded, were guided around the east shore of Tanambogo by Lieutenant Spencer, RAAF, and under cover of darkness attempted a landing on a small pier on the northeastern tip of the island. One boat, containing the 2d Platoon, had hung upon the coral coming into Gavutu and did not take part in the assault on Tanambogo.

The first boat landed without incident, and the men began deploying along the beach. As the second boat was discharging its platoon, however, a shell from one of the fire support ships landed in a nearby fuel dump, and the resulting glare lighted the landing area and exposed the Marines. The enemy opened up immediately, taking all boats under rifle and machine gun fire. Casualties were caused among the Marines ashore and still afloat, but the boat crews suffered most heavily, being exposed. One crew suffered total casualties, and the operation of the craft was taken over by one of the Marines embarked.

The machine gun platoon embarked in the second boat (4th Platoon, Company D) managed to set up two of its weapons on the pier, but the intensity of fire directed by the enemy at the exposed and well illuminated position forced it to withdraw.

In the meantime, Crane and about 30 men had gone ashore. The intensity of resistance, however, made withdrawal inevitable, and Crane succeeded in reembarking all wounded and all but 12 of the able survivors. The boats withdrew, some to Gavutu where they reported the event, and others direct to the ships, where the wounded were taken aboard. Two men of those left on the beach managed to return to Gavutu at about 2200 in a rowboat, while Crane and Lieutenant John J. Smith, leader of the 2d Platoon, and the rest of the dozen men made their way around the beach and over the causeway, arriving at Miller's command post at about midnight.⁴⁰

After nightfall, action continued. The enemy on Gavutu were reinforced by individuals who swam to the island from Florida and

⁴⁰ *Final Report*, Phase II, p. 6. Letters, Major Harold R. Thorpe to Commandant Marine Corps, 19 January 1949, Kyle to CMC 10 February 1949, and Miller to CMC, 9 February 1949.

Tulagi. A strong group sallied from a cave under the southern slope of Hill 148 and counterattacked, without effect. The entire group was wiped out. Other enemy, coming ashore at various points around the island, under concealment of heavy rain, attacked and caused a small number of casualties without, however, altering the fact that the Parachute Battalion controlled the island.

At 2200, having been informed of the abortive attack in Tanambogo, General Rupertus requested the release of an additional combat team. This request, reaching Vandegrift during his conference with Admiral Turner on board the USS *McCawley*, was acted upon immediately. Vandegrift, Turner concurring, decided to release the remaining two battalions of the Division Reserve (2d Marines reinforced). At 0330, 8 August, the USS *President Hayes* and *President Adams*, with the 2d and 3d Battalions, 2d Marines (reinforced) embarked, were ordered to proceed from the transport area off Beach Red at Guadalcanal to the Tulagi transport area. Orders were issued at the same time to the battalion commanders to land their troops at Beach Blue and report to General Rupertus for duty.⁴¹

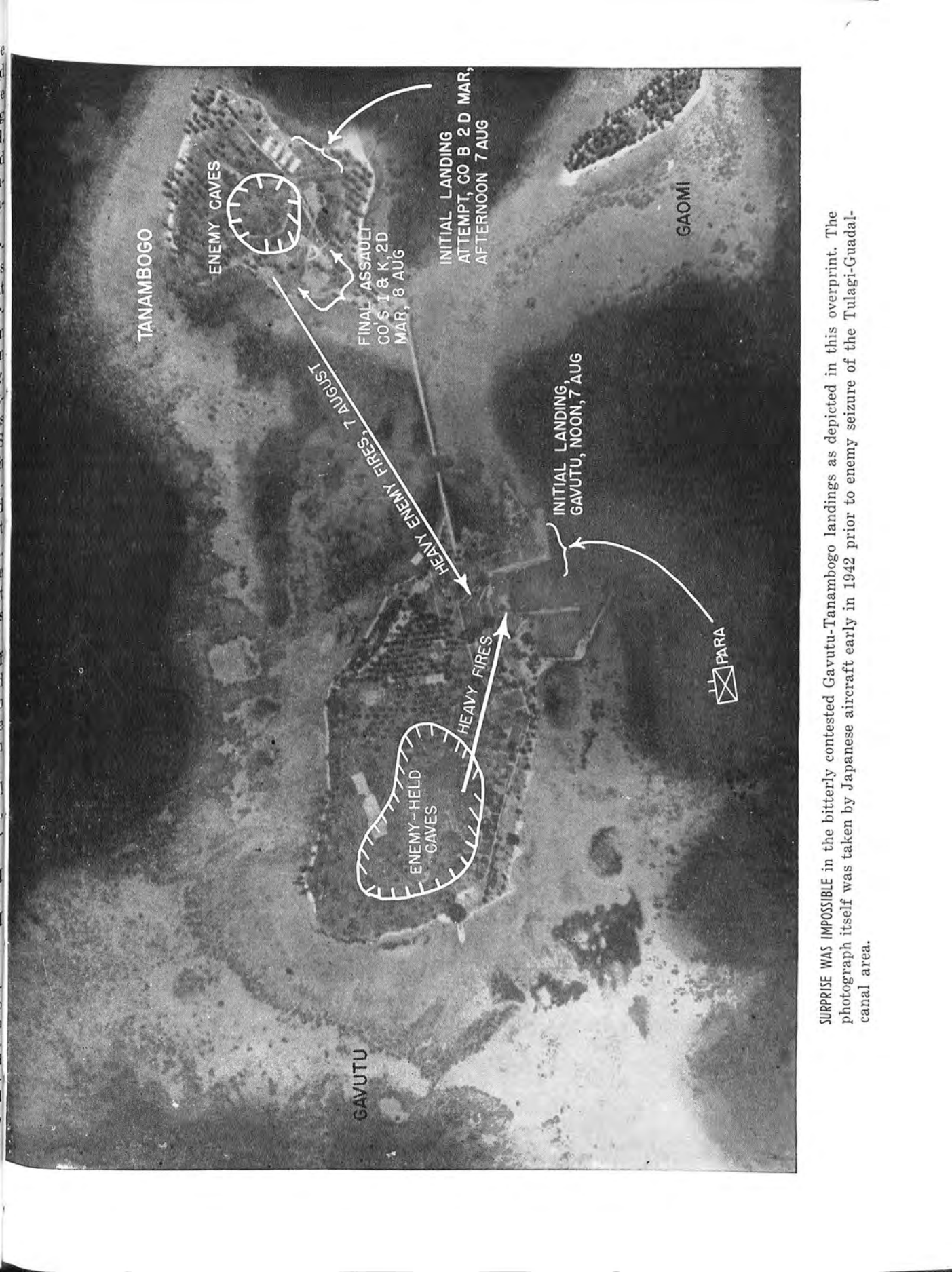
Upon arrival at the transport area off Beach Blue at 0730, the 3d Battalion, 2d Marines was directed to pass to Gavutu to reinforce the troops engaged there and seize Tanambogo. Orders for the 1st Battalion were not changed.

The 3d Battalion, under Lieutenant Colonel R. G. Hunt, landed in a series of 3-boat waves spaced at 10-minute intervals, with companies in the following order:

Company L, with 5th Platoon Company M attached, at 1000;

Company K, with 4th Platoon Company M attached, at 1025;

⁴¹ Letter, CWO Thomas W. Huston to Commandant Marine Corps, 29 December 1948. Orders to report to Rupertus did not go through Colonel John M. Arthur, commanding officer of the 2d Marines. Each battalion commander was notified direct, and it was not until he reached Espiritu Santo (see below) that Arthur knew which of his troops had been committed. Interview, Colonel Robert E. Hill, 18 April 1949.



TANAMBOGO

ENEMY CAVES

FINAL ASSAULT
CO S I & K, 2D
MAR, 8 AUG

INITIAL LANDING
ATTEMPT, CO B 2D MAR,
AFTERNOON 7 AUG

GAOMI

HEAVY ENEMY FIRES, 7 AUGUST

INITIAL LANDING,
GAVUTU, NOON, 7 AUG

PARA

HEAVY FIRES

ENEMY-HELD
CAVES

GAVUTU

SURPRISE WAS IMPOSSIBLE in the bitterly contested Gavutu-Tanambogo landings as depicted in this overprint. The photograph itself was taken by Japanese aircraft early in 1942 prior to enemy seizure of the Tulagi-Guadalcanal area.

Company I, with 3d Platoon Company M attached, at 1050;

Company M, less 3d, 4th, and 5th Platoons, with Headquarters Company, at 1120.

Upon landing, Lieutenant Colonel Hunt assumed command of the operation. Troops were deployed initially to eliminate all remaining opposition on Gavutu.⁴²

At 1225, Captain W. B. Tinsley, commanding Company I, was ordered to prepare for a landing on Tanambogo. He would have the support of two tanks from the 2d Tank Battalion (one of the reinforcing units of the 2d Marines), and his attack would be preceded by a 10 minute naval gunfire preparation by *Buchanan*. The company would not be accompanied by its supporting machine gun platoon, which was to stay in position on Gavutu and lay down supporting fires from there.

At 1315 the tanks landed on Gavutu and Lieutenant E. J. Sweeney, commanding them, was ordered to land at 1615 on Tanambogo, using one tank to cover the south side of the hill on that island and the other to cover the eastern slope.

The naval gunfire preparation was laid down as planned, beginning at 1600. Twenty minutes later the assault company landed preceded by the tanks. Lieutenant Sweeney, while observing from one of them, was killed, but his vehicle rendered valuable support to the riflemen. The other tank, getting too far ahead of the assault troops, was disabled by an iron bar and set afire by enemy riflemen who used oil-soaked rags. The entire enemy group was wiped out, 42 bodies being piled up around the disabled tank.

At 1620 Company I landed and separated in two groups, one of which worked up the southern slope of the hill and the other, moving off to the right and then inland, fought its way up the eastern slope. Heavy resistance was encountered, coming from small enemy groups in position in dugouts and caves in the coral. The eastern group's position was made more dangerous by the presence of a few enemy riflemen and machine gunners on Gaomi, a tiny islet lying directly east of

⁴² *Report of Operations, 3d Battalion, 2d Marines (reinforced)*, p. 2.

Tanambogo and only a few hundred yards away. Naval gunfire was requested again, this time from *Gridley*, and was laid down at 1700 on Gaomi. The interference from that point ceased abruptly.

Immediately after the establishment of the beachhead on Tanambogo, a supporting attack was launched across the causeway, at 1700, by the 1st Platoon of Company K. This platoon secured the Tanambogo end of the causeway and took up positions for the night in that area. At 1900 Company I was supplied by boat with ammunition from Company M.

By 2100 the southeastern two thirds of the island had been secured, and at 2300 a light machine gun platoon from Company M reported to Company I for support against enemy counterattacks. Considerable close in fighting took place during the night between the Marines and individuals or small groups who sallied from foxholes and dugouts. No change in position occurred, however, and late the next day the island was completely secured.

While the 3d Battalion, 2d Marines, was assisting in the clean-up on Gavutu, and while one company was securing Tanambogo, the other two battalions of that regiment, with a part of the supporting troops, were coming ashore on Tulagi. The 1st Battalion, unengaged since landing on 7 August on Florida, went ashore at Beach Blue at 0900, followed one hour later by the 2d Battalion.

Here, as at Guadalcanal proper, the amphibian tractor began to emerge as a versatile piece of equipment whose importance and utility could hardly be overestimated. From noon of 8 August throughout the following night, five of these vehicles of the 3d Platoon, Company A, 2d Amphibian Tractor Battalion (one of the reinforcing elements of the 2d Marines) operated between Gavutu and the *President Adams*, where the platoon had been embarked. Carrying water, supplies, and ammunition, as well as personnel on the ship-to-shore trips, they acted as ambulances on the return trips, evacuating wounded. On one occasion a tractor operated far inshore, interposing itself between a

group of wounded men pinned down by fire from an enemy dugout and the emplacement whence the fire was coming. Using its two machine guns—one .50 caliber and the other .30 caliber—to neutralize the enemy fire, the tractor picked up the wounded and evacuated them. The five tractors of the platoon were taken back on board the *Adams* before sundown, 9 August.⁴³

With the fall of Tanambogo, the last organized resistance in the island groups ceased, and subsequent operations consisted of mopping up and the establishment of defense. Under the head of mopping up, however, came the taking of several small peripheral islands—Makambo, Mbangai, Kokomtambu, and Songonangona.⁴⁴ Gaomi, which had caused temporary annoyance to the members of Company I as they were busy on Tanambogo, had been silenced conclusively early in the morning of 9 August by Battery I, 10th Marines, which laid in 60 rounds of 75mm (pack howitzer) fire from its positions on Gavutu.⁴⁵

The mission of clearing out these small foci of infection was delegated to various units of the 2d Battalion, 2d Marines. Makambo was taken by Company E, Mbangai by Company F against slight opposition, and Kokomtambu, with Songonangona, by Company G, which also encountered minor resistance. Occupation of all these smaller islands was completed during the morning of 9 August.

⁴³ Details of the operation of 3d Battalion, 2d Marines and reinforcing elements on Gavutu and Tanambogo were taken *in toto* from *Detailed Report of Operations, Guadalcanal, Tulagi, and Gavutu Sectors*, Third Battalion, Second Marines (reinforced). MCR. Evacuation of wounded was supervised by D. S. Oman, of the American Red Cross.

⁴⁴ Spelling of place names are those which appear in *Sailing Direction for the Pacific Islands*, Hydrographic Office, U. S. Navy Department, H. O. No. 165, 1948. Vol. I, p. 323. The versions given there differ in numerous cases from those used in official reports of the campaign. Kokomtambu, for instance, appears in at least three different guises, while Songonangona surrendered its musical name to the irresistible American desire to be cute, and emerged as a coy "Singsong" Island.

⁴⁵ Landed at 1800 on 8 August and went into position to cover Tanambogo. *Report of Operations*, 3d Battalion, 2d Marines.



GAVUTU AND THE CAUSEWAY across which the 3d Battalion, 2d Marines, assaulted Tanambogo. View is taken from high ground on Tanambogo.

The taking of the entire Island group—Tulagi and its satellites—had been accomplished in three days. The entire enemy garrison, with the exception of a few survivors who made their way to Florida Island (and to ultimate capture or extinction by native and Marine patrols), was wiped out. A few prisoners were taken, questioned, and sent to rear areas, most of them finally being placed in a prisoner of war camp near Featherstone, New Zealand.

Comparatively, the American losses were not excessive. An early report by Rupertus to the effect that the Parachute Battalion had suffered 50-60 percent casualties can only be explained in terms of inadequate communications between him and his troops ashore.⁴⁶

The exact number of enemy casualties will never be known. It was estimated that about 1500 enemy, including several hundred conscript laborers, were present on the various islands of the group at the time of the landings. Twenty-three prisoners were taken, and an intelligence summary gives 70 as the approximate number of survivors who escaped to Florida. The distribution of enemy forces, as given in the *Final Report*, the source for the figures given herein, was about 500 on Tulagi (all Landing Force and Naval Aviation personnel) with the remainder on Gavutu, Tanambogo, and the smaller islands.

Immediately after organized resistance ceased and the isolated defending groups

⁴⁶ *Final Report*, Phase II, Annex N. First entry.

were rounded up and wiped out, Tulagi and its satellite islands were organized for defense against counterattack. The Parachute Battalion shaken by its experience on Gavutu, was moved from that island at 1700 on 9 August to Tulagi, where it went into position in the Government building area. The 2d Battalion, 5th Marines occupied the southeastern sector of the island, while two battalions of the 2d Marines took over the defense mission in the northwestern two-thirds, the 1st Battalion at the extreme end of the island and the 2d Battalion at Sasapi. Third Battalion, 2d Marines took over the occupation and defense of Gavutu, Tanambogo, and Makambo.⁴⁷

The logistic problem on Tulagi was, in miniature, that which was encountered on Guadalcanal and which will be discussed in detail below. Certain details peculiar to Tulagi complicated the problem, however, and should be mentioned here. The beachhead, for instance, was severely restricted in character, and there were no usable roads. Only after noon of the second day was it possible to move supplies ashore at the piers on the eastern coast.⁴⁸ At Gavutu, in effect, there was no beachhead, and only ammunition and water could be moved in until the islands were secured.

The supply situation may best be summed up by the following comments from officers of two of the units involved.

E-2-5 landed with three days' rations, and received nothing but captured rice and one (1) 1-gallon can of tomatoes from 7 August until 21 August,

⁴⁷ *Final Report*, Phase II, Annex N. Letter, Colonel Cornelius P. Van Ness to Commandant Marine Corps 12 January 1949. Defense initially was oriented against an anticipated attack from Florida and artillery positions were selected with this, as well as the possibility of a seaborne attack, in view. Interview, Col. Manly L. Curry, 28 January 1949.

⁴⁸ It had been planned to use these piers at once, apparently on the assumption that the island would be overrun almost without delay. *Report*, Commander Transport Division 8. According to this report, supplies, except water and ammunition, did not begin moving ashore until nearly midnight of 8 August.

when we were transferred to Guadalcanal by APD's. One meal per day from 11 August on.⁴⁹

The Parachute Battalion landed on Gavutu with weapons, ammunition, medical supplies, and two or three days' supply of "C" and "D" rations only. Prior to embarking in landing craft, each individual made up a roll which consisted of clothing, mess gear, necessary comforts of life, and field bedding. These rolls, together with vital organizational equipment were loaded in landing craft. Almost all these rolls, with most equipment were never received, thus causing undue hardship and inconvenience after the Parachute Battalion moved to Tulagi.⁵⁰

Another officer has an explanation of the failure of the individual rolls and equipment to reach shore. According to this account, which is substantially the same as the above, the equipment was placed in the landing craft, after they reported back to the *Heywood*, their mother ship, when the troops were put ashore.

An air raid warning occurred as the boats loaded with the packs were almost to the beach, and without allowing them to proceed and unload they were recalled to the ship, and coxswains ordered to throw the gear over the side in order to lighten them sufficiently for cranes to swing them aboard.⁵¹

Large quantities of Japanese material were found, including considerable amounts of documentary intelligence matter. Some food, as we have seen above, was also taken, and, like the engineering and radio equipment, was put to immediate use.

The Tulagi area, after the first three days, became quiet. Enemy planes by-passed it in striking at the more tempting air field and perimeter on Guadalcanal. Surface craft shelled it occasionally, but never was it subjected to the kind of bombardment that struck Guadalcanal in October. There is no record that enemy forces landed either on Tulagi or on Florida.

The island served as a base from which were mounted several of the more important patrol actions of the campaign — to Savo Island, to Malaita, and to Guadalcanal itself.

⁴⁹ Letter, Major Harry S. Connor to Commandant Marine Corps, 14 February 1949.

⁵⁰ Letter, Miller to CMC, 17 December 1948.

⁵¹ Letter, Colonel Justin G. Duryea to Commandant Marine Corps, 17 January 1949.



THE GUADALCANAL CAMPAIGN

CHAPTER III

Guadalcanal—The First Three Days

TASK GROUP X-RAY, containing the Guadalcanal assault forces, separated from Task Group Yoke northwest of Cape Esperance and approached the transport area off Beach Red in double column at 12 knots.¹ No sign of enemy activity was encountered and the preliminary naval bombardment of the coastal area, which began at 0613, elicited no response. At 0645 the transport area was reached. Five minutes later the signals "Stop" and "Back" came from the *Hunter Liggett*, followed immediately by the traditional Navy signal to commit the troops—"Land the landing force." The double column dropped anchor and stopped in perfect formation, and landing craft began moving over the sides.

The command post of the division had opened on board the *McCawley* at 0519.² Eight minutes later, General Vandegrift was asked by Admiral Turner to set the time for H-hour. He did so, selecting 0910, and then, as news of the successful landings on Florida and Tulagi began to come in, the first waves of assault troops moved toward Beach Red.³

There was still no sign whatever of incipient or potential opposition. At 0859, 11 minutes before the first troops were scheduled to go ashore from the landing craft, reassuring words came from an observation plane from *Astoria* operating in the vicinity of the beach. No enemy could be seen in that area.⁴ Fifteen minutes later, however, word

came from the same source that trucks were moving on Lunga Field, several thousand yards west of the landing beach. This news brought forth a request for an air strike against that area. While the request was being complied with, by VS-3's from *Saratoga*⁵ a message came from the beach that the troops were going ashore at 0919.⁶ There was no opposition at the beach.

INTELLIGENCE SITUATION

In order to understand the plans for landing and for the subsequent maneuvering of the troops, it is necessary at this time to review the intelligence situation as it existed from the beginning.

To put the matter succinctly, the division planners and ultimately all echelons of command above that level had only the haziest idea of the terrain of Guadalcanal. Sailing charts which contained data assembled over a period of years from official hydrographic surveys and from information given by navigators contained little that could be used by a staff planning a land campaign on Guadalcanal. No maps worthy of the name were in existence. It had been necessary, as we have seen, for the Intelligence Officer of the division to enlist the services of former residents of the territory and get from them, by word of mouth, some idea of the terrain upon which the division was to operate.

The information so gathered was extreme-

¹ *Action Report, Task Group 62.1*, p. 3.

² *D-3 Journal*, Initial entry, 7 August 1942.

³ *Ibid.*, Messages 2 and 4.

⁴ *Ibid.*, Message 13.

⁵ *Action Report, USS Saratoga*.

⁶ *D-3 Journal*, 7 August 1942. Messages 14, 15, and 16.

ly spotty in quality. Whereas it was possible for the planners to get a good idea of the character of that portion of the island immediately adjacent to the coast, and particularly that portion which was threaded by the small coastal roads and trails, it was impossible to obtain any detailed information whatever regarding that part of the island which lay inland, away from the cultivated coastal area. It soon became apparent, indeed, that while the British or Australian residents of the district had a fair knowledge of the territory immediately surrounding their area, they were nearly as ignorant as the newcomers about the terrain features of the jungle-covered interior of Guadalcanal.

Two outstanding examples of the faulty nature of this advance information can be pointed out here. The first example is more amusing than important—that which has to do with the scrambling of the names Ilu and Tenaru. Three rivers flow into the coastal plains in the vicinity of Beach Red. The largest and by far the most important is the Lunga, and about that there was never any doubt. The second most important from the point of view of the landing is a long and relatively swift stream arising in the foothills behind the plains and descending to the sea in a series of broad, shallow rapids and deep, almost stagnant pools. In general character it resembles the Lunga, which also is long and varied in appearance. Between these two rivers lies another completely unlike them in appearance and characteristics, a deep, sluggish, lagoon-like body of no great length.

According to the earliest chart available (No. GC 146, 1937), the river which constituted the western boundary of Beach Red is the Tenaru. Flowing into this river almost at the mouth and from the right bank, there is a small stream which, in the days before the war, was known to the natives as the Ilu. The sluggish stream between the Lunga and the Tenaru seems to have been unnamed by the natives since its relatively short length and its similarity to countless other lagoons on the coast reduced it to comparative unimportance from their point of view.

Basic to the misunderstanding in the subsequent Gordian tangle of the names is the fact that near the mouth of this lagoon there stood a native village called Tenaru. Pilot Officer Charles V. Widdy, RAAF, a former resident of the island and a volunteer for duty with the division, is said to have pointed out the village and said that it was Tenaru. He was thought to be referring to the river and the name was attached to the undeserving creek. Since it was also known that the Ilu was a stream lying to the east of the main body of the Tenaru, logic demanded that the name be attached to the long swift river at the extremity of Beach Red.

Much later, when Army forces on the island were busy with cartography, they attempted to rectify the situation, and with something approaching logic they contended that if the Ilu really was the Tenaru, then the Tenaru must, of necessity, be the Ilu. This reasoning was followed on maps that were made subsequently, and the rivers were so marked on signs erected upon the bridges that crossed them. So involved did the whole matter become, indeed, that it had unforeseen repercussions, for by 1945, the natives, hopelessly confused by the controversy, were themselves no longer sure which river was which.

So the matter stands today, but the first and perhaps the decisive land action of the campaign was fought at the mouth of the unnamed lagoon known temporarily and erroneously as the Tenaru. Later in the campaign, the lagoon became known as the Alligator Creek—it had no native name—and the Tenaru once more bore its correct name. For the purposes of this monograph, the name Alligator Creek will be used, and the battle fought at its mouth will continue to be known as the Battle of the Tenaru.

The second example of erroneous information—given and received in good faith—was that dealing with the terrain feature known as Mount Austen. In General Vandegrift's operation order, the 1st Marines were assigned an objective described as a grassy knoll four miles south of Lunga. This knoll had been described several times to planners

by former residents as the commanding terrain feature of the vicinity, and the implication was that it was close to the Lunga plains and easy of access from them.

The advance information about Mount Austen was correct in only one respect—it was a commanding terrain feature. The idyllic name of “Grassy Knoll” actually described a rugged truncated hill mass some 1500 feet in height, covered with alternating patches of rain forest and kunae grass, surrounded on its lower reaches by a chaotic system of cliffs, ravines, and gorges—all overgrown with lush and almost impenetrable vine growth. It lay, furthermore, perhaps six miles west and eight miles south of Lunga Point, which would place it some ten miles southwest of Beach Red, and was separated from that beach by rivers, jungles, precipitous ravines, and small plains covered with six-foot kunae grass. Parenthetically, it may be said here that Colonel Cates, commanding the 1st Marines, realized almost at once that the possibility of his attaining that objective was so remote as to be fantastic, and General Vandegrift, upon receipt of his advice concurred immediately. As a matter of fact, the hill mass presented a constant threat to the airfield and to the troops in the vicinity of it in spite of constant patrolling begun immediately after the perimeter was set up.

Lest it seem that this matter of faulty intelligence is being labored, it must be emphasized, that in this, the first land offensive of American forces during the second World War, those plans which were formulated for the initial assault were based on nebulous, often contradictory, and seldom accurate information. The fact that the character of such information was recognized quickly, and that plans for continuing the campaign were changed radically in accordance with correct data, speaks eloquently for the ability of General Vandegrift and his staff to improvise quickly and effectively.

Information regarding the size of the enemy force on Guadalcanal was meager in the extreme. Coastwatchers on the island had kept as close a watch as was humanly possible and had forwarded the information so

obtained through their regularly established communications channels.⁷ They had likewise made use of information obtained from loyal natives whose good faith was unquestioned, but whose mathematical powers were not too well developed. On the basis of such data, it was at first estimated that approximately 5,000 enemy were present in the Lunga district.⁸ It was thought that this total included about 2,100 labor troops, a reinforced infantry regiment, and an anti-aircraft battalion.⁹

The plans for the attack of necessity had to be based upon such information as was at hand, and they called for a landing which would take advantage of, first, the probable localization of enemy forces around Lunga Point and, second, the characteristics of the terrain itself. Since it was understood that the enemy would be concentrated in the vicinity of the airfield then under construction, and since a direct frontal attack was to be avoided if possible, it was decided to select a beach far enough from the area to allow time for landing and deployment of troops, and for maneuver prior to actual assault. It was desirable also to select a beach the configuration of which was such that some protection could be obtained from the terrain itself.¹⁰

The beach finally chosen lay about 9,000

⁷ Reference is directed to *The Coastwatchers*, by Commander Eric Feldt, RANR.

⁸ An estimate of the situation, prepared by the division while in Wellington, on 11 July 1942, suggested a total of 5,000 including one infantry regiment (3,360) one engineer battalion (375) and miscellaneous combat and labor personnel (1,265). A revised estimate, dated 27 July, gives the same total but a slightly different breakdown. Both documents are contained in folder 3K, Guadalcanal Documents, Marine Corps archives. No basis can be found in documents for the estimate of 2,100 laborers which is contained in the *Final Report*, Phase II, p. 9.

⁹ It is interesting to note that even Japanese sources are ambiguous on the point of the actual number present on the island on 7 August 1942. Wording of translated Japanese documents is such as to justify a round figure of perhaps 2,000, of which the greater part were laborers.

¹⁰ *Final Report*, Phase II, p. 9.



LOYAL NATIVES such as these, together with their leader, Captain Martin Clemens, Australian government representative on Guadalcanal (even while in Japanese hands) rendered invaluable services to the Marines. These natives were all members of the Solomon Islands police forces.

yards southeast of Lunga Point. A strip 1,600 yards in length was selected at the deepest point of a gentle re-entrant in the coast-line. The right flank (northwestern extremity) of the beach was marked by the Tenaru River, which, it was thought, would offer a natural line of defense against any possible interference with the landing from the west or the northwest. The eastern extremity had no such natural protection.

THE FIRST DAY

Operation Order 7-42 called for a landing on Beach Red by the 5th Marines (reinforced), less 2d Battalion (employed on

Tulagi). This group would land with its remaining two battalions abreast, 1st Battalion going into position on the right. The 3d Battalion was to go into position immediately on the left (southeast) flank to act as beachhead defense against enemy activity from that direction. The 1st Marines (reinforced) would land at H-hour plus 50 minutes in column of battalions, 2d Battalion leading and followed by 3d and 1st Battalions in that order. Immediately upon landing and assembling, the regiment would pass through the right section of the beach and attack almost due west on an azimuth of 260 degrees, battalions echeloned to the left rear in order of landing. Its mission was to seize Grassy Knoll and to be prepared for further advances. The

INITIAL DISPOSITIONS

GUADALCANAL, 7 AUGUST



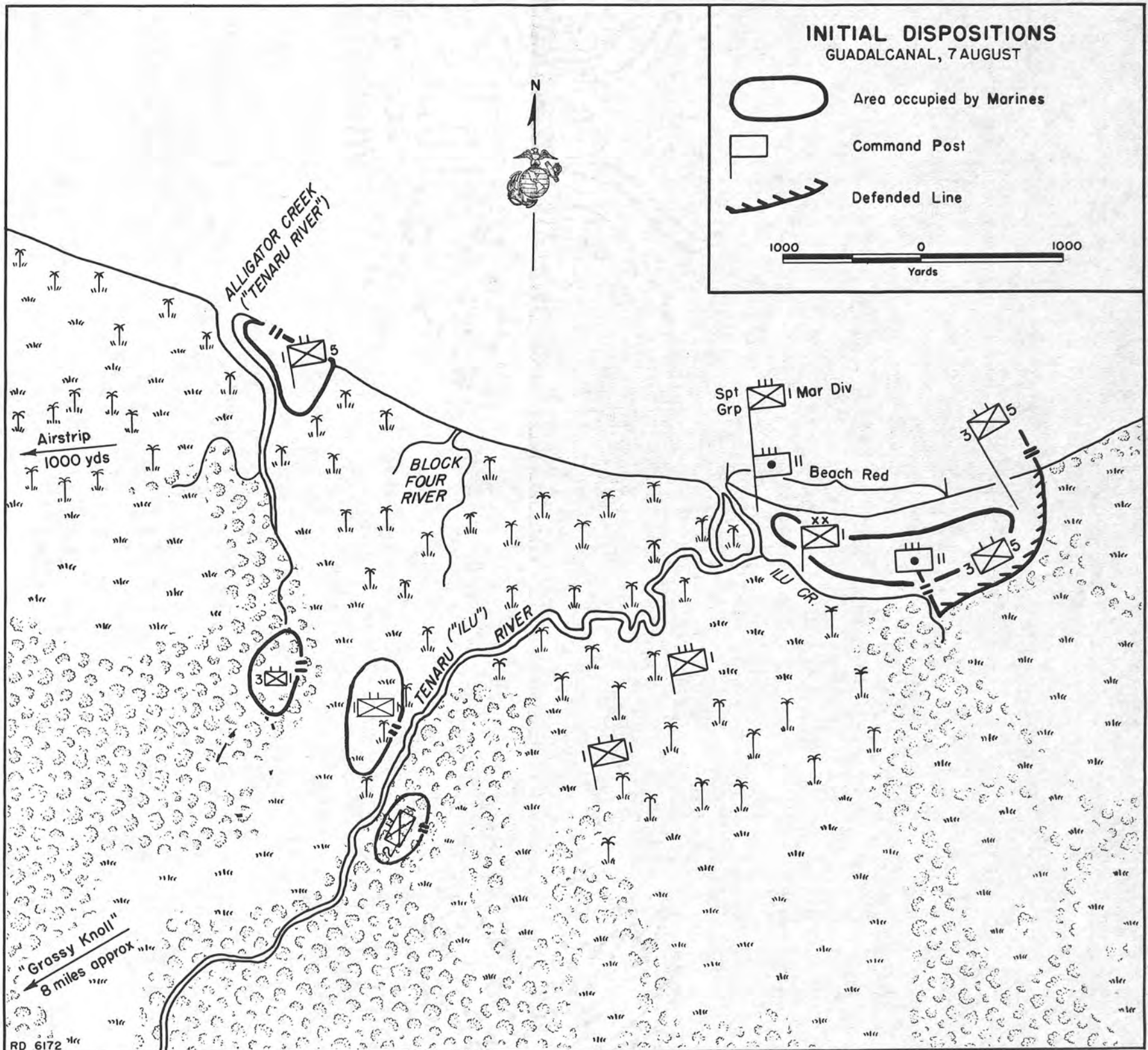
Area occupied by Marines



Command Post



Defended Line



1st Battalion, 5th Marines, meanwhile would advance west and secure the line of the "Tenaru" River (actually Alligator Creek.) The Support Group, consisting of Headquarters, 11th Marines, and all other division troops not employed on Tulagi, was to land on order over Beach Red.

Six floatplanes were supplied the assault forces by the heavy cruisers of Task Force 62. Three of these, from the USS *Astoria*, were used as liaison planes whose first duty was to mark the extremities of Beach Red with smoke so that the target area would be clearly visible to the transports and the landing craft. Three additional planes were supplied by the *Quincy* for use as spotting planes by the 11th Marines, the division artillery.¹¹

The actual landing was accomplished as planned, with dispatch and without opposition. By 0938, regimental headquarters of the 5th Marines was ashore, and its first command post had opened about 100 yards inland. The 1st Marines had accomplished their part of the landing operation by about 1100, for by that time the regiment was beginning to pass through right elements of the 5th Marines.¹²

By 1400 the 1st Marines were well on the way to carrying out the assigned part of their mission. Message #75 (D-3 Journal, 7 August) contains the following message:

"1410 Troops getting along OK on beach river holding them back one-half mile inland."

Movement of troops from the beachhead began at this time. At 1400 the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, had been ordered to move off toward the west to secure and occupy the line of Alligator Creek, upon which it was to take up positions for the night. The battalion, with regimental headquarters and the Weapons Company, began to move at once,

¹¹ *Final Report*, Phase I, Annex G, p. 2. This use of planes caused much adverse criticism both on the part of the pilots and the Marines. It was pointed out by them that such tactics, if employed against a defended beach, would result in the immediate loss of all planes, for the marking process made necessary a series of no less than eight runs at very low altitude. *Ibid.*, Phase II, p. 15.

¹² *Final Report*, Phase II, Annex L (Record of Events, 5th Marines).

while the 3d Battalion remained in position covering the southeast flank of the beachhead.¹³

The 1st Marines, however, realized almost at once that it would be impossible to get on the Mount Austen objective.¹⁴ The hill mass which had been so designated, and which had been visible from the ships, could not be seen from the beach. Furthermore, the regiment was passing through unexpectedly rough terrain and was learning that the banks of the Tenaru, which wound like a snake back and forth across the regiment's line of advance, were steep, thickly overgrown, and difficult of passage, and that the river itself was not fordable.¹⁵

At 1430, Colonel Cates reported that he was still passing through the right front of the 5th Marines and that no contact had been made as yet with the enemy.¹⁶

At about this time the Support Group was coming ashore from the ships of the Transport Group, which had moved in to within 2,000 yards of the beach. At 1515, General Vandegrift notified Admiral Turner that his command post was opened on shore, and 45 minutes later the General himself was on the beach.¹⁷

¹³ *Final Report*, Phase II, Annex L, p. 1.

¹⁴ At about noon, the regimental executive officer and the operations officer requested Colonel Cates to have the objective re-examined in view of the unexpected roughness of the terrain and distance of Mt. Austen. Cates did so that night at a conference with Vandegrift. Interview, Colonel William W. Stickney, 15 January 1949.

¹⁵ Here also the amphibian tractor's versatility was demonstrated, on its first day of trial in action. Warned by Pilot Officer Widdy, during the rehearsals at Fiji, that the rivers and lagoons would be deep, members of the Engineer Battalion rigged a rough bridge of dunnage and timber (irregularly acquired on board ship) and sent it ashore on board two tractors. The two vehicles were driven into the Ilu backwash, a small stream flowing into the Tenaru at its mouth from the southeast, and formed pontoons across which the jury-rigged bridge was thrown. *Final Report*, Phase II, Engineer Annex.

¹⁶ *Final Report*, Phase II, p. 10. See also Annex M to that document and *History of the First Marines*, MCR.

¹⁷ *D-3 Journal*, messages 85 and 91. MCR.

By nightfall, the units ashore were in position as shown on the accompanying map.

Several important lessons had been learned during the first day's operation. The ship-to-shore movement had been a gratifying success. Two reinforced regiments, and all division troops, had landed on Guadalcanal; the regiments had carried out their assigned missions where it was geographically possible to do so.¹⁸ The landing was carried out with something of the ease with which a similar maneuver might have been accomplished in a peacetime drill. The fact that no enemy opposition was encountered was conducive to smoothness of operation, but even taking this into consideration, the entire D-day operation from the point of view of the Commanding General, who was bringing his troops ashore for combat, was an outstanding success.

The movement of supplies, however, from the landing craft to the beaches and ultimately to the supply dumps, was an entirely different matter. Certain phases of this operation were characterized by the same smoothness and efficiency as the troop movement. Specifically, unloading from holds to landing craft and movement to the beach proceeded according to schedule. Once the landing craft touched the beach, however, they encountered a situation which, almost as the first craft landed, began to deteriorate. Captain L. F. Reifsnider, Commander of Task Group 62.1, reported as follows:

A serious situation developed early during landing operations when the labor section of the shore party was unable to cope with the rapidity and quantity of supplies and equipment delivered at the beach. The situation is ascribed to a total lack of conception of the number of labor troops required to unload boats and move material off the beach, failure to extend the beach limits earlier in the operation, and, to some extent, lack of control of troops on and in the immediate vicinity of the beach — it was definitely understood and agreed that the unloading of the boats and the removal of material from the beach would be done by the labor section of the Pioneer Battalion. . . .¹⁹

¹⁸ *Final Report*, Phase II, p. 15. See also introductory remarks, same document, p. 1, MCR.

¹⁹ *Action Report, Task Group 62.1*, p. 9. Provision for handling of supplies was set up in Force Gen-

By the terms of *Landing Operations Doctrine, United States Navy*, (FTP 167) Chapter 2, Section II, paragraph 212 (a), the unloading of the material of the Landing Force from small boats was a task to be performed by the military component of the Shore Party. Reifsnider's reference to the Pioneer Battalion is interesting in that only 310 men of that unit were present as a body and even these had been assigned an active defense role as part of Colonel del Valle's Support Group. The rest of the battalion had been parceled out to various regiments as reinforcing elements. A feeling comment on the subject of the relationship between the Shore Party Commander and the Naval [Task Force] Commander is contained in a 12 February 1949 letter to the Commandant of the Marine Corps from Colonel Frederick L. Wieseman, who commented on the matter under discussion as follows:

The initiation of general unloading by the Naval (Task Force) Commander is a matter that should be prevented by custom, doctrine, high command, Joint Chiefs of Staff Directive, and force of arms if necessary. . . . *Nothing* should be landed on a beach unless the Shore Party Commander has OK'ed its dispatch.

Reifsnider's complaint, however, justified in terms of the undeniable fact that supplies were piling up on every beach, is nevertheless an example of the somewhat remote viewpoint of the observer afloat who may be conversant with only his own part of the picture. What had happened in fact was that General Vandegrift, on the basis of what intelligence he had, was anticipating momentarily commencement of a meeting engagement of major proportions, at some point short of his objective, the airfield. As a result, although the Division operation order had provided that the Shore Party might call upon unit

eral Order No. 7-42, 25 February 1942. This in turn formed the basis for the supply section of 1st Marine Division Administrative Order 2a-42, which accompanied Operation Order 7-42. Paragraph 6 (a) of the Administrative Order directed Shore Party Commanders to call upon troop commanders in their immediate vicinity for assistance in the handling of supplies from landing beaches to dumps. It nowhere directed that a troop commander upon whom the request was made would necessarily comply.

commanders for additional labor, no units as such were being held on the beaches, but were in or enroute to assembly areas preparatory to the anticipated battle. Consequently they could not be made available for labor purposes, however important this might seem. Captain Reifsnider's "hundreds of Marines" (as reported by seamen and observed from on board the *Hunter Liggett*) were largely the rear elements of units already engaged in the slow advance through the jungle toward the field.

At 1321, Admiral Turner had directed Captain Reifsnider to expedite unloading.²⁰ By 1449 the advance message center was advising General Vandegrift that the shore party commander was badly in need of at least 500 men to help unload boats.²¹ It said further that no men were available on the beach for that function. Less than an hour later, Reifsnider informed General Vandegrift that 15 men from each cargo ship were being detailed to help unload boats until they could be relieved by pioneers.²²

This measure was in the nature of make-shift, and the constant stream of material arriving at the beach could not be handled. In spite of the fact that every effort was made, at one time 100 loaded boats had been beached while 50 more were standing by just outside the breakers waiting an opportunity to land. So chaotic had conditions become that, by 2330, the commander of the Shore Party reported to General Vandegrift that unloading was entirely out of hand;²³ that supplies were arriving much faster than they could be handled; and that it was imperative that the ships cease unloading until the beach could be cleared. Three hours later Admiral Turner advised General Vandegrift that his²⁴ request was being carried out.

Enemy activity during the day had been confined to air strikes launched from Rabaul.

²⁰ *D-3 Journal*, Message 70, 7 August 1942.

²¹ *Ibid.*, Message 82.

²² *Ibid.*, Message 89.

²³ *D-3 Journal*, Message 104, 7 August 1942.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, Message 105. (This is entered in a transcribed version of the Journal as having gone out on 7 August, whereas it actually bears the time notation of 0242 8 August.)

At about 1100, a coastwatcher stationed in the Upper Solomons reported that a force of 18 bombers had just passed his station, headed for Guadalcanal. At 1320 this force appeared, striking ineffectually at ships in the transport area off Beach Red.²⁵ The destroyer *Mugford* was hit by a 250-pound bomb and suffered 20 casualties, but no other vessel in the group was touched. The attacking planes were reported to be twin engine Type 97's. Two were shot down by antiaircraft fire from the ships.

A second attack came at about 1500, when the same area was struck by ten 99 Aichi dive bombers.²⁶ No damage resulted from this strike, and again two enemy planes were brought down by antiaircraft fire. In neither attack was any attempt made by the Japanese to damage material on the beach.

During the first night the only disturbance which occurred resulted from the nervousness of some troops who lacked combat experience and who were in unfamiliar surroundings without definite knowledge of the size or whereabouts of the enemy forces to their front. No Japanese activity was noted, but there was considerable firing in the area to the west and northwest of the beachhead, in the zones occupied by the 1st and the 5th Marines. Both regiments suffered casualties as a result.²⁷

GENERAL VANDEGRIFT'S CHANGE OF PLAN

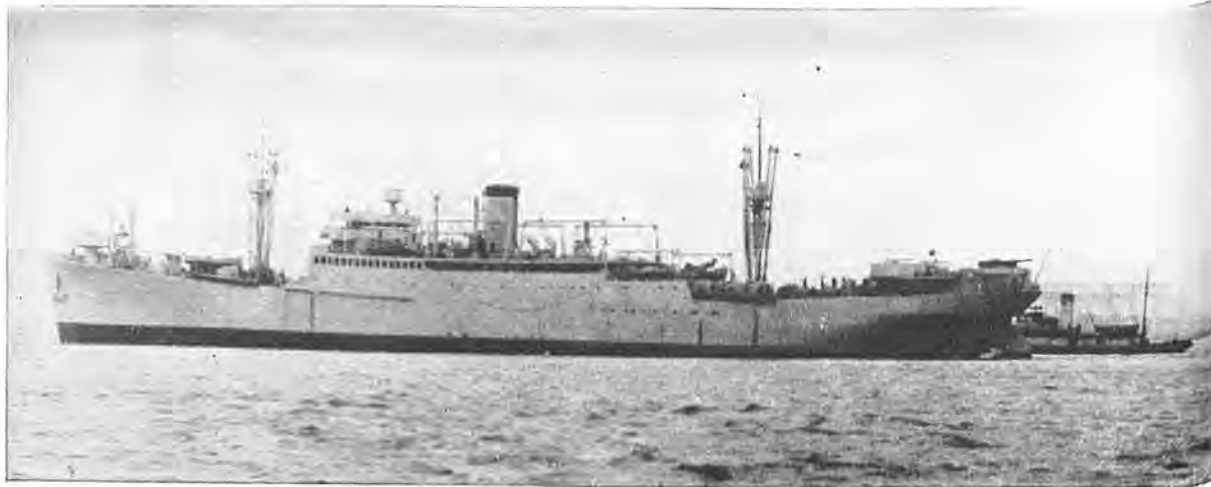
At 2200 on 7 August the two regiments were informed of a change in plans.²⁸ As we have seen, the objective of the 1st Marines was too far removed to be possible of attainment. With less than a division of troops—for the reserve regiment, which would have brought the infantry strength up to normal,

²⁵ *Report of Action, Commander Task Group 62.1*, p. 4.

²⁶ *Preliminary Report, CinCPac*, pp. 2 and 3.

²⁷ Interview, Captain John J. Jachym, November 1944.

²⁸ *Final Report, Phase II*, p. 11. (The narrative says only that orders were issued during the night of 7-8 August. Annex M, p. 1, puts the time of the change of orders at 2000, 7 August.)



THE TRANSPORT, GEORGE F. ELLIOTT, was the first to be sunk in the Guadalcanal campaign, on 8 August 1942. Before U.S. torpedoes administered the *coup de grace*, the burning *Elliott* silhouetted other U.S. men of war for the Savo Island disaster.

was committed on Gavutu-Tanambogo, and one battalion of the 5th Marines was busy on Tulagi—the great hill mass of Mount Austen could not be secured. Its assault would have required the separation of a major unit from the main body, and in such a case liaison (where possible) would have been difficult in the extreme. The logistics of the movement would have been appallingly difficult.

The plans for 8 August, therefore, called for occupation of the airfield and establishment of a defensive line along the Lunga River. Those elements of the division which had been assigned the mission of establishing and maintaining defensive positions along the eastern and southeastern boundaries of Beach Red were ordered to continue that mission.

At 0930, 8 August, the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, supported by Company A, 1st Tank Battalion, crossed Alligator Creek at its mouth and advanced toward the Lunga with its right flank on the beach. The advance was cautious and deliberate. In the meanwhile, the 1st Marines, who had spent the night along the Tenaru River south of the positions occupied by the 5th, began their advance to the west. The 1st Battalion, 1st Marines, was somewhat hindered in its advance by the fact that it had to cross the creek some 500 yards

inland from the mouth. The 2nd and 3d Battalions, however, skirted the headwaters and plunged immediately into the thick jungle growth which lies to the south of the airfield. Contact between units was faulty due to their failure to patrol to the front and flanks.²⁹

By nightfall the regiment had attained only part of its objective. The 1st Battalion had overrun the airfield and had succeeded in reaching the Lunga; the 2d and 3d Battalions, however, slowed down by the difficult terrain to a rate of approximately 500 yards per hour, went into bivouac south of the airfield.

The advance of the 5th Marines had been without incident of a serious nature. In reaching their objective they had traversed the area which had been occupied by the main Japanese force. First enemy resistance, from scattered individuals had been met and several prisoners had been taken. From them, as well as from captured documents, it was learned that no serious resistance was to be expected for the time being. The negative nature of all information from front line units verified this. At 1430, therefore, the regiment was ordered to contract its front, to cross the Lunga by the main bridge immediately north of the airfield, where the

²⁹ *Final Report*, Phase II, pp. 10 and 11. Annex M, p. 1. Annex I, p. 1.

main road cuts inland to avoid the several branches of the river near the beach, and to advance in the direction of Kukum. This movement was accomplished with Weapons Company in advance, and at 1500 Marines reached the main Japanese encampment.³⁰

It was immediately obvious that the enemy force was smaller than had been thought and the fact was confirmed that the Japanese had retreated in a state bordering on complete demoralization. Large quantities of food, ammunition and equipment were found in perfect condition, and much engineering materiel, electrical apparatus, and radio equipment was captured intact. There had been no attempt at demolition by the enemy. There was some destruction by Marines initially because of lack of proper indoctrination, but this condition was corrected almost at once. The only damage apparently had been caused by the bombardment preceding the landing, and the completeness of the enemy installations are well described in the final action report as follows:³¹

The extent to which the enemy had been able to develop their Lunga Point positions was remarkable in view of the short time of occupation. Since July 4th they had succeeded in constructing large semi-permanent camps, finger wharves, bridges, machine shops, two large radio stations, ice plants, two large and permanent power plants, an elaborate air compressor plant for torpedoes, and a nearly complete airdrome with hangars, blast pens, and a 3600 foot runway.

The most serious enemy activity during the day had consisted of a repetition of the re-

taliatory measures of 7 August. Soon after 1100, warning was received from Pilot Officer Cecil John Mason, RAAF, a coastwatcher stationed on Bougainville, that a large number of planes had been sighted over his post, flying southeast.³² At noon they appeared over the area to find that all ships of the task force, alerted by the warning, were at maximum speed.

Approximately 40 twin engined torpedo planes participated in the attack. Two ships were lost. The destroyer *Jarvis*, hit forward by a torpedo, managed to leave the area under her own power but disappeared with all hands while making her way to the southeast. The transport *Elliot*, set afire when an enemy plane crashed on board, had to be beached and destroyed by her sister ships. Survivors were taken aboard the *Hunter Liggett*.

Twelve of the attacking planes were shot down in the vicinity of the ships by anti-aircraft fire from the ships and by fighter planes from Admiral Noyes' carriers operating to the south. Two more were accounted for by shore-based anti-aircraft weapons. Still others were shot down by carrier-based fighters to the west of the transport area. A total of seven American planes were lost.³³

THE NAVAL WITHDRAWAL

The burning of the *Elliot* had two adverse consequences, entirely apart from the loss of the ship herself. Included in the supplies aboard her had been a good share of the material of the 2d Battalion, 1st Marines, and that was lost.³⁴ The second, and more serious, consequence was the fact that the glare caused by her burning allowed enemy observers in the neighborhood of Tassafaronga to see the cruisers and destroyers which were shortly to be attacked on that night of 8-9 August, and to report their presence to the advancing enemy task force.

In the evening of 8 August, General Vande-

³⁰ *Final Report Solomon Islands Operation*. CinCPac, 23 August 1942. "The warning from this coastwatcher was of the greatest value."

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 13.

³⁰ *Final Report*, Phase II, Annex L, and p. 11.

³¹ *Final Report*, Phase II, p. 12. In expansion of this data, LtCol Robert G. Ballance, USMC, wrote in 1949: Item "an elaborate air compressor plant" was actually a liquefaction plant for the manufacture of oxygen by compressing it to liquefaction and then "fractionally" distilling it. This plant would have provided compressed air for torpedoes as well as aviation, medicinal, and welding and cutting oxygen. The wanton destruction of this plant, then 70 to 75% complete, with remaining components on hand ready for installation was truly deplorable, for eventually just such a plant had to be hauled out from the United States and erected on the island. (Letter, Ballance to CMC, 12 February 1949.)

grift was called to a conference aboard the USS *McCawley*, flagship of Task Force 62. While there he was told that Admiral Turner had decided to remove all transports and cargo vessels from the area at 0600 next morning, 9 August. The reason given for this decision was the fact that advice had come from Admiral Fletcher, Commander, Task Force 61, telling of a shortage of fuel and of the loss of 21 of his 99 planes, and of his consequent decision to withdraw.³⁵

This posed a new and most alarming problem for General Vandegrift and his staff. Plans made by the division had been formulated on the assumption that the ships would remain for four days in the target area so

³⁵ It has been widely believed that Admiral Fletcher's decision was reached on the spot late in the day of 8 August. This is not the case. A dispatch sent to Fletcher by Vice Admiral Ghormley on 2 August (after Callahan had reported the gist of the Fiji conference) shows that even prior to that date Fletcher had planned to withdraw his task force, and therefore also the transports, before D-day plus three. Ghormley, not protesting, thereby gave tacit approval to Fletcher's plan to withdraw. *War Diary, ComSoPac*, 2 August. The division commander had no information that such a withdrawal was planned, the first indication of it coming to him as described above. Operation Plan 1-42 dated 16 July 1942, ComSoPac, had directed that all vessels fuel to capacity during the rehearsal at Fiji. Tankers used were the *Platte* and the *Cimarron* each with 12,000 tons of fuel oil and 500,000 gallons of aviation gasoline, and the *Kaskaskia*, with 13,000 tons of oil. This order had been carried out at the conclusion of the exercises, immediately prior to departure for the objective. *War Diary, ComSoPac*, June, 1942, contains the text of the plan.

"When Fletcher, the man on the spot, informed me he had to withdraw for fuel, I approved. He knew his situation in detail; I did not," Ghormley ms, p. 93. According to data secured from ships' logs, every ship in Task Force 61 had on hand enough fuel when the log was closed on 8 August to last for at least four days. The carriers could have operated for 17 days, *North Carolina* for 18 days, the cruisers for about 11 days, and the destroyers, most voracious of the lot, for about seven days. These figures are based on the average daily consumption of each individual ship taken over the period of 1 to 8 August, 1942, and take into account the fact that two "short-legged" destroyers — *Benham* and *Grayson* — had fuel enough for three and two days respectively. Logs may be found in the National Archives.

that all supplies could be put ashore. However, even with the removal of all supplies to the beach, the division would have been in a somewhat precarious position, for the shortage of shipping and the unforeseen demand for haste had made necessary a cut below the basic allowances ordinarily prescribed. The unloading process, as we have seen, had been complicated by a condition approaching chaos on the beach, and the movement from ship to shore had been stopped as a result. The withdrawal of the supply ships, therefore, was from a troop standpoint, little short of a catastrophe, but Admiral Turner's decision was not changed.

Shortly after midnight of 8-9 August, moreover, friendly surface forces operating in the Solomons area suffered a sudden and overwhelming defeat. The events leading up to the disastrous Battle of Savo Island are interesting.

There can be no doubt at this time that the American attack on Tulagi and on Guadalcanal came as a surprise to the enemy at Rabaul as well as to the smaller forces in the target area.

The American convoy had been sighted as it approached the area by an enemy lookout in the vicinity of Cape Esperance. There appears to have been a breakdown in communications between his post and Tulagi, for his warning did not alert the people on the latter island.³⁶ The attack, moreover, cut the area off from communication with the enemy rear areas (the radio installations on Tulagi, Gavutu, and Tanambogo had been destroyed by the prelanding bombardment by the *Sarah Juan* and the two destroyers which accompanied her). Captain Miyazaki, of the Imperial Japanese Navy, who was on duty at Rabaul at the time, was questioned on November, 1945, as a prisoner of war. He said, in speaking of the events of 7 August 1942, "Early in the day we lost communication with Gavutu, so did not know what happened."³⁷

³⁶ *Japanese Campaign in the Guadalcanal Area*, Headquarters, USAFISPA. (Hereinafter referred to as the USAFISPA Report.) P. 3.

³⁷ *Interrogations of Japanese Officials*. USSBS (Pacific). Volume II, p. 419.



VICTIM OF SAVO ISLAND, the heavy cruiser *Astoria* burned throughout the morning of 9 August 1942, until, engulfed by uncontrollable flames, she sank.

Communication must have been reestablished quickly, however, or else the enemy must have been able to deduce, from the silence that had fallen over its forces in the Tulagi area, that an attack had been mounted. By afternoon of 7 August a naval task force was being assembled from units in Kavieng and Rabaul.³⁸ It was formed from elements of the 8th Fleet, and consisted of five heavy cruisers—*Chokai* (flying the flag of Rear Admiral Gunichi Mikawa, CinC, 8th Fleet), *Kako*, *Furutaka*, *Aoba* (Rear Admiral Goto), *Kinugasa*, the light cruiser *Tenryu* (Rear Admiral Matsuyama), and *Yubari*—with one old destroyer *Yunagi* from the 4th Destroyer Division. Rendezvous was effected northwest of Bougainville, and the force came down the stretch of water which lies between the parallel chains of islands of the group and which was later to become known as the “Slot”.

This force was sighted at 1130 on the morning of 8 August by a U. S. observation plane which maintained contact with it for about an hour.³⁹ The results of the observation were reported at once, but through some

mixup in the communication chain which has never been satisfactorily explained, the screening force of United States and Australian ships apparently was not apprised of the potential danger which the enemy task force presented.⁴⁰

The screening force, divided in two groups, was patrolling the approaches to the transport area on each side of Savo Island when, at about 0130 of the morning of 9 August, it was attacked and overwhelmingly defeated by an enemy force which immediately retired from the area. No attempt was made by the Japanese to pursue the advantage which had been gained, and the transport area was left unmolested. The attack had been preceded by the dropping of flares from Japanese cruiser-based planes, and information subsequently got from prisoners indicates that the attacking force was aided by observation from Cape Esperance made possible by the illumination from the flares and from the burning transport, *Elliot*.⁴¹

³⁸ *Preliminary Report Solomon Islands Operation*, CinCPac, p. 11, paragraphs 45 and 46. “Why no enemy report from anyone?” From letter Rear Admiral Crutchley to Admiral Turner, 10 August 1942. Admiral Crutchley was in command of the screening force.

⁴¹ *Campaigns*, USSBS, p. 106.

³⁹ USAFISPA Report, p. 4.
⁴⁰ *Campaigns of the Pacific War*, USSBS (Hereinafter referred to as *Campaigns*, USSBS), p. 106.

The results of the attack were little short of catastrophic for the Allied forces. Of the five cruisers on station at the time, four were sunk and the other badly damaged. *Chicago* sustained damage, while *Astoria*, *Vincennes*, *Canberra*, and *Quincy* sank during the night and the early morning.⁴²

Post-war interrogation of Japanese prisoners answered a question which arose immediately after the Japanese withdrawal—why had the attacking force refrained from annihilating the then defenseless transports? It appears that one 8-inch round fired from the second group to be attacked—the Northern Group—penetrated the operations room of *Chokai*, destroying all equipment and charts.⁴³ This together with the fact that there was some delay in resuming proper formation, impelled Vice Admiral Mikawa to withdraw rather than run the risk of being overtaken by planes during a later withdrawal.

A belated vengeance overtook another ship of the force when *Kako*, about to enter the harbor of Kavieng the next morning, was sunk off Simberi Island by an American submarine, the old S-44.⁴⁴

WITHDRAWAL OF TASK FORCE 62

There is no evidence to show that the proximity of the enemy task force had any bearing upon the decision of the Commander of Task Force 62 to retire, although the position, speed, and direction of the enemy group were known to him prior to his conference with General Vandegrift. The exact composition of the force was not known, and the enemy's intentions were not accurately estimated.⁴⁵

⁴² Included among Marine casualties aboard the three American ships were two pilots of VMO-251, who went down with the *Vincennes*. Three others, aboard the *Astoria*, were rescued.

⁴³ *Interrogations*, USSBS, Volume II, p. 362.

⁴⁴ These details are taken, with the author's permission, from an exhaustive manuscript by Walton L. Robinson. Hereinafter referred to as *Robinson ms.*

⁴⁵ *Preliminary Report Solomon Islands Operation*, CinCPac, p. 6, paragraph 23.

According to the War Diary of the Commander, Task Force 62, the following troops were left in the Guadalcanal-Tulagi area when the transports and supply ships withdrew:

At Guadalcanal:

Division Headquarters Company, less detachments
 Division Signal Company, less detachments
 5th Marines (less 2d Bn.)
 1st Marines
 11th Marines (less E Battery, and the 1st and 4th Bns.)
 1st Tank Bn., less detachments
 1st Engineer Bn., less detachments
 1st Pioneer Bn., less detachments
 1st Amphibian Tractor Bn., less detachments
 1st Service Bn., less detachments
 1st Medical Bn., less detachments
 1st Military Police Co.
 2d Platoon, 1st Scout Co.
 Local Naval Defense Force
Total on Guadalcanal, about 10,000

At Tulagi:

1st Raider Bn.
 1st Parachute Bn.
 2d Bn., 5th Marines (2d Pl., Co. A, 1st Pioneer attached)
 1st, 2d, and 3d Bns., 2d Marines
 H and I Batteries, 3d Bn., 10th Marines
 Detachment Division Hq Co.
 Detachment 2d Signal Co.
 3d Defense Bn. (less detachments)
 Company A, 1st Medical Bn.
 Company A, 2d Engineer Bn. (2d Platoon, Company A, 1st Engineer Bn. attached)
 Company C, 2d Tank Battalion
 Company A, 2d Amphibian Tractor Bn., 2d Platoon Company A, 1st AmTrac Bn.
 Company D, 2d Medical Bn.
 Company A, 2d Pioneer Bn. (2d Platoon, Company A, 1st Pioneer Bn. attached)
 Battery E, 11th Marines
 Company C, 2d Service Bn.
 Local Naval Defense Force
Total on Tulagi, 6,075
Total personnel left in area, about 16,075

The 2d Marines, under Colonel John M. Arthur, had formed the Division Reserve and had, as a part of its ultimate mission, the occupation of Ndeni, in the Santa Cruz Islands.

As we have seen all three battalions of the regiment were committed. This was done by orders from Rupertus direct to the battalion

commander in each case and not through the normal chain of command.⁴⁶ The regimental headquarters remained afloat, however, as did all administrative personnel and all records of the regiment and its battalions. In addition to these, working parties from all companies, as well as most of the Headquarters and Service Company, Regimental Weapons Company, and G and Headquarters and Service Batteries, 3d Battalion, 10th Marines, remained aboard ship.

When the transports left the area on 9 August, this group (which totaled 1390 officers and men) were taken, in Transport Divisions 2 and 12, to Espiritu Santo, where, according to the War Diary of Commander, Task Force 62, they were used to "reinforce the garrison there." On 14 August, Colonel Arthur was ordered by Admiral Turner to report to the Commanding General, Espiritu Santo, for duty. He did so, but within a few days he was ordered to return to Tulagi with a small number of officers and men of his command.⁴⁷

A good-sized complement of Marines was left on Espiritu Santo, however, for elements of the 2d Marines were subsequently ordered by Admiral Turner to form a "2d Provisional Raider Battalion", to consist of a small headquarters and six rifle companies. This was done, but the unit was disbanded on 22 September, two days after arrival of the authentic 2d Raider Battalion, under Lieutenant Colonel Evans F. Carlson. Eight hundred men of the 2d Marines and Battery G, 10th Marines, were then ordered to return to Tulagi. They arrived 9 October with 358 men of the 6th Naval Construction Battalion.

The forming of the "2d Provisional Raider Battalion" gave rise to a considerable correspondence by Admirals Turner, Ghormley, and Nimitz, and the Commandant of the Marine Corps, General Holcomb.

It will be recalled that General Vandegrift was operating under immediate command of Admiral Turner, Commander Amphibious

Force, South Pacific. In a letter written to ComSoPac on 29 August, Turner said in part:

6. In many circumstances in the future amphibious warfare in the South Pacific, it is believed that a Marine Regiment, or a part of a Marine Regiment, or two Marine Regiments, will be the size of a force appropriate for offensive and defensive amphibious operations. The employment of a division seems less likely. . . . The problem of mopping up outlying detachments will exist throughout the campaign. For this reason the Commander, Amphibious Force, South Pacific, has reached the conclusion that Marine regiment (sic) will not be an entirely suitable combat unit for operations in the South Pacific unless it has, as an integral part of its organization, either a Raider or a Parachute Battalion. The previous concept that Raider and Parachute Battalions are always division or corps troops is no longer agreed to.

7. In view of the foregoing, and in order to prosecute promptly the operations required by prospective tactical situations, the Commander Amphibious Force, South Pacific, will, unless directed to the contrary, proceed with the organization of Provisional Raider Battalions in the Second, Seventh and Eighth Marines, and give these already trained troops such additional specialized training as seems appropriate. Furthermore, he recommends that Marine Corps Headquarters issue directions for the permanent organization of Raider Battalions as integral units of all Marine regiments now attached to, or ultimately destined for, the Amphibious Force, South Pacific. It is not recommended that the total personnel strength of the regiments be increased.

Vice Admiral Ghormley forwarded the letter to Commandant Marine Corps on 6 September, via Commander in Chief, U. S. Pacific Fleet, with his own reactions to Turner's suggestions attached in the form of a first endorsement:

The organization of Raider Battalions from the organic troops of the 7th and 8th Marines should be withheld pending a declaration of policy by the Commandant, Marine Corps. . . .

A copy of this endorsement was sent to Turner.

Admiral Nimitz, in turn, added a second endorsement, also directed to General Holcomb, on 24 September:

The Commander in Chief, U. S. Pacific Fleet is of the opinion that Raider Battalions are specialized troops and should be reserved for appropriate tasks — and that extemporized organization of Marine Forces should be made only in case of dire necessity.

⁴⁶ Interview, Colonel R. E. Hill.

⁴⁷ *War Diary CTF 62*. September and October, 1942.

This correspondence elicited the following reply on 3 October from General Holcomb, in the form of a letter to Nimitz:

The Commandant noted with much concern the order from the Commander, Amphibious Force, South Pacific Force, to organize a raider battalion, on a temporary basis from the units of the 2d Marines, less its battalions. He made no comment at

the time for reason that at this distance no one could form an opinion as to the necessity of carrying out this most unusual procedure. The objections thereto are clearly set forth by the Commander-in-Chief, U. S. Pacific Fleet, and appear to need no further comment. . . . It is noted with regret that Admiral Turner's letter of August 29th does not contain the views of the Commanding General, 1st Marine Division, in a matter in which he is particularly qualified and concerned.



THE GUADALCANAL CAMPAIGN

Establishment of the Perimeter and Battle of the Tenaru

CHAPTER IV



THE EXISTENCE OF THE FLEET MARINE FORCE in 1942, together with the leadership and amphibious technique it had produced, made Guadalcanal possible. This picture, taken in August 1942, shows the Marine leaders who launched the campaign, including two — Vandegrift and Cates (front row, fourth and sixth from left) — future Commandants of the Corps.

BY SUNDOWN 9 August, all ships had cleared the area, and the Marines were left with inadequate supplies, no idea as to when that condition would be ameliorated, and very meager intelligence of the enemy forces on the island. Task Force 61, whose planes had done yeoman service during the first two

days, had withdrawn, and the remnants of the cruiser force which had patrolled the western approaches to the island had been forced to leave the vicinity.

Because the force at his command was a relatively small one, General Vandegrift decided that every emphasis be placed on

defense of the Lunga point region, including the all-important airfield.¹

The defense itself would be centered on the field, with the strongest positions of the perimeter placed along the beach proper as a precaution against counter-landings. This sector was organized in two regimental sub-sectors. Automatic weapons were sited for water's edge defense. Thirty caliber machine guns were set up so that their final protective lines would lie along the actual edge of the beach. The heavier weapons, .50 caliber machine guns and 37mm guns, were so emplaced as to be able to deliver antiboat fire. Emplacements were dug some distance back of the beach for the half-track 75mm, but the weapons themselves were kept mobile in readiness for movement forward to other prepared positions near the water's edge.²

Infantry was assigned the task of protecting these weapons emplacements and was scattered in foxholes along the line. The larger part of the force, however, was kept

¹ *Final Report, Phase III, pp. 1 and 2.* The orders for the dispositions described were given orally.

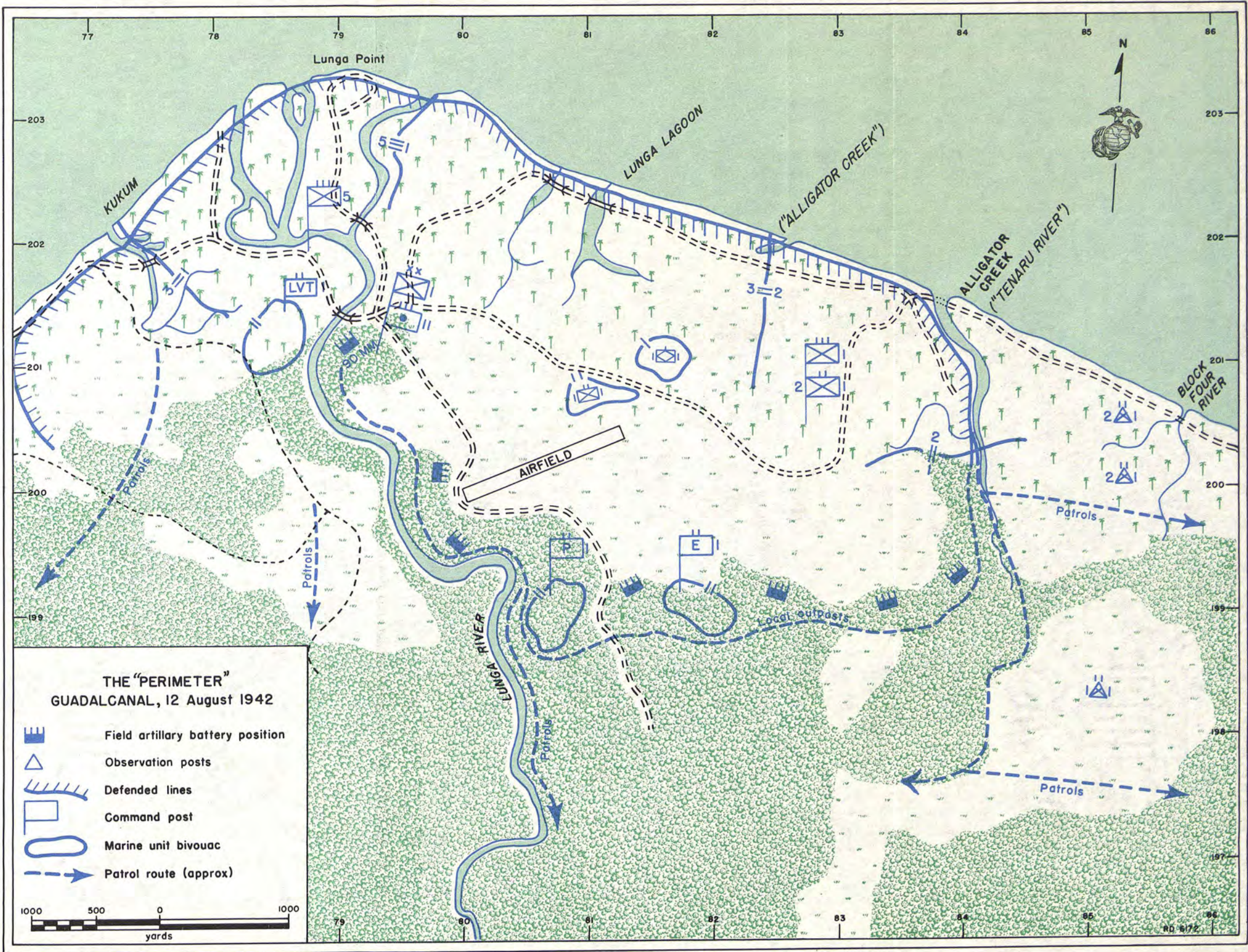
² *Final Report, Phase III, p. 2.*

within the perimeter, ready to move in any direction to deal with possible penetration of the lines, as well as for counter-attacks at the proper time. Mortars in general were retained in the rear of their respective battalion positions, while the artillery, 75's and 105's of the 11th Marines, was grouped well inland to the south of the airfield in such position that it could be used for the defense of any threatened sector of the perimeter.

The entire defense area was generally in the shape of a long, flat oval with the long axis running in an east-west direction. One curve lay along the beach where there was no natural defense save the water itself. The right, or east portion, of the perimeter was bounded by Alligator Creek, a sluggish, deep stream. Such was the character of the land through which it flowed, and of the banks and the undergrowth along them, that it formed an admirable defensive position, and one of which full advantage was to be taken in the first land action of the campaign. The left bank of this river was used as a line for the extension inland of the right flank. Machine gun emplacements were constructed at the



BEACH DEFENSES were hastily established with such meager materials as had been left by the retiring transports. Japanese counter-landing behind the Marine perimeter was a constant threat during early days of the campaign.



only point where crossing seemed feasible—at the very mouth of the river, where, at low tide and during dry weather, a sand bar permitted foot passage from bank to bank along the beach.

The left or west flank of the perimeter had no such naturally advantageous terrain upon which to depend. Westward of the mouth of the Lunga, there is a re-entrant in the coast, a long sweeping concave curve toward the Matanikau River, four miles away. At a point midway between the two rivers, the grassy ridges, which are the outward boundary of the rough country of the interior, impinge suddenly upon the coastal plain, and the latter is reduced to a narrow corridor several hundred yards wide, between the beach and the hills. In this terrain, the coconut palms disappear and are replaced by lowland jungle. Passage through the region, save by the coastal road, is difficult. It was decided to anchor the left flank on this higher ground and extend the lines from beach and across the narrowing coastal plain on the theory that the knolls could be used to an advantage in dominating the corridor.

Between the inland extremities of each flank extension lay a chaotic jumble of ridges, ravines, and flat jungle country. It was impossible to establish a continuous line across such terrain even had there been sufficient Marines for the task. The alternative to such a defense was to dispose various units in compact areas along the general defensive line and maintain contact and security by a system of out-posts. It was realized that any attack from inland could result in a penetration of the perimeter, but such a disposition of troops would permit the various unit sectors to be defended separately, so that the normally disruptive effect of penetration would be minimized.³ This was supplemented by the practice of sending patrols inland for about 1500 yards. These patrols in general were formed from units defending inland sectors.

The enemy struck back quickly as a result of the stimulus of American attack. Low-level

bombing attacks were frequent and effective, both against the troops and the engineers who were struggling to finish the partially completed air strip. The initial effectiveness of these attacks was lessened when the anti-aircraft group of the 3d Defense Battalion succeeded in emplacing one battery of four 90mm guns on the periphery of the airfield.⁴ The attacks, however, continued into the following year, becoming sporadic after 15 November.

Enemy surface craft meanwhile enjoyed practically undisputed possession of the waters adjacent to Guadalcanal during the period 9-20 August. Shelling by submarine, as well as by larger craft, became a regular occurrence, causing relatively minor damage to shore installations, but seriously impeding operations of small craft back and forth to Tulagi.⁵

An all-out offensive on the part of the Marine forces was out of the question. Only a part of the reinforced division was in the perimeter, and even that small part was, logistically, in a precarious position.⁶ The area which it had occupied and which it was prepared to defend was but a tiny fragment of the total surface of the island.

Of the several possible methods of obtaining information to supplement the existing scanty knowledge, only one ultimately proved to be useful, patrolling. Aerial observation,

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 5 of narrative portion of report.

⁵ *D-3 Journal*, 12 August. A message at 1200 from Rupertus to Vandegrift reported that Tulagi forces had fired upon and hit an enemy submarine one hour before. This craft had been molesting Higgins boats.

19 August: Dawn — three unidentified ships sighted off Guadalcanal 0850—Ships appear to be firing on Guadalcanal. 0900 One destroyer reported coming toward Tulagi area. 0915 Salvo fired on Makambo. All hands to battle stations.

Report of Operations, 3d Battalion, 2d Marines.

⁶ Some idea of the supply situation can be obtained from a message sent by the Assistant Division Commander on 10 August at 0902 when the last of the transports had left the area and when all available supplies had been landed. The message said that the situation was changing. It requested entrenching tools, sandbags, barbed wire, diesel oil, and TBX (radio) batteries, saying that none of these materials had been landed. *Final Report*, Phase III, p. 5.

³ *Final Report*, Phase III, Annex E.

even had there been planes to carry it out, would have been of limited usefulness. The heavily wooded areas of the island provided overhead cover for ground troops under which they could operate with almost perfect freedom from discovery. Aerial photographs were subject to almost the same limitations as direct aerial observation.

The information received from observation posts likewise was largely negative in character. The same natural peculiarities that operated against adequate aerial observation on the first and second days of the campaign also operated to prevent any appreciable amount of information being obtained visually from fixed posts. Once more, it is necessary to point out that, save along the coastal plain in the vicinity of the coconut groves and the coastal road, the terrain is characterized by precipitous ridges running in every direction and separated by deep, narrow ravines. Visibility from observation posts in country of this type is extremely limited, and the negative character of information to be obtained from them is by no means as indicative or as valuable as similar information obtained from similar posts in open or flat country.

Third method of obtaining information, and the one which was actually used by the Marine forces, was that of patrolling.⁷ Each regiment in the perimeter including the 11th Marines was assigned certain areas outside the perimeter for such operations. Patrols of varying size were sent out daily and in general operated between the hours of 0700 and 1800.

Patrolling on the first two days of the campaign was somewhat characterized by over-caution and lack of aggressiveness, but these faults were overcome eventually. On 9 August, a 5th Marines patrol operating several miles southwest of the Kukum sector of the perimeter met a heavily armed enemy patrol in the first definite encounter with enemy forces. A small action resulted, and unspecified casualties were suffered by both parties. Again on 10 August, a similar patrol also from the 5th Marines operating still farther

⁷ *Final Report*, Phase II, pp. 17 and 18.

afield, and attempting to cross the Matanikau River at its mouth, was denied that crossing by a strong, well armed, and apparently well-emplaced enemy force on the west bank. Similar patrols operating in the opposite direction to the southeast of the perimeter had as yet made no contact with enemy forces.

The information so obtained indicated that the nearest enemy force was somewhere west of the perimeter. The negative information on the other hand, while it by no means ruled out the possibility of other forces to the southeast, showed at least that patrol activity could be pushed farther afield in that direction.⁸

THE GOETTGE PATROL

These considerations led to the organizing of two patrols, each of which exerted a profound effect on the early progress of the campaign, although those effects were diametrically opposed to each other. The first, which was the result of faulty planning and a lack of appreciation of the basic theories of patrolling, caused a serious loss to the division staff, as is hereinafter described.

The necessity for gaining more exact information regarding enemy forces near the Matanikau impelled the division intelligence section to lay tentative plans for a thorough reconnaissance of the territory.⁹

The initial plan, as far as it is possible to reconstruct it, seems to have been sound. A sortie was to be made by boat from Kukum in the early morning and a landing made on the beach near Point Cruz. The patrol, hav-

⁸ *Ibid.*, Phase II, p. 5.

⁹ The account of the Goettge Patrol has been taken from the *Final Report*, from contemporary accounts such as *Merillat's Island*, and from the initial drafts of the annexes to the *Final Reports*, which are on file in the Archives of the Marine Corps. The details obtained from those sources have been elaborated on the basis of accounts given the compiler by officers and men present on the island at the time—Colonel (now Brigadier General) Gerald C. Thomas, Lieutenant Colonel (now Colonel) Edmund J. Buckley, who replaced Goettge as D-2, First Lieutenant (now Captain) John J. Jachym, and others.

ing landed, was to make its way up the left bank of the Matanikau River, making careful observation of the terrain, and establish a bivouac for the night as far back in the hills as time would allow. The second day was to be spent in a cross country return to the perimeter. The patrol was to be large enough to permit combat if the occasion demanded.

According to an officer present at the time, Lieutenant Colonel Goettge, Division Intelligence Officer, was already committed to accompany a patrol toward Tetere, which will be described below, when he was advised of the tentative plans for the Matanikau operation. He immediately assumed personal charge of the project, and, in view of two bits of information that had recently come to him, decided upon several radical changes in plans.

A naval warrant officer had been taken prisoner in the vicinity of Kukum, behind the lines of the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines.¹⁰ Subjected to routine questioning by regimental and divisional language officers, he had said that it was possible that some of his fellows to the west might be persuaded to surrender under certain conditions. The information he gave was such as to place the group somewhere in the general area of the proposed patrol. The second item of information was the reported appearance of a white flag, seen by a patrol on 12 August, also in the area the patrol was to cover. This was taken as further evidence that the enemy in that neighborhood desired to surrender.

There was no reason to doubt the sincerity of the prisoner. He was reticent and did not volunteer information, and it was only after considerable questioning that he agreed to the possibility of the surrender. Moreover, it is probable that the putative white flag of surrender was an ordinary Japanese battle flag flying so far from the observers that the red center was not visible.¹¹

¹⁰ Interview, Lieutenant Colonel Gordon D. Gayle, 14 February 1949.

¹¹ The reliability of information gotten from prisoners was a source of amazement to Marines throughout the campaign. No documentary record can be found of attempted deception. See incident in Chapter IX below.

The original plan called for an early start so that the landing could be made by daylight and ample time could be available for reconnaissance before going into bivouac. Colonel Goettge, however, had introduced additional details that caused almost twelve hours' delay. He was convinced that many noncombatant Japanese were wandering through the jungle in starving and disorganized groups and that every effort should be made to enable them to surrender. This humane attitude caused him to alter the composition of the proposed patrol to include, among others, the 5th Marines' surgeon, Lieutenant Commander Malcolm L. Pratt, and Lieutenant Ralph Cory, a Japanese linguist. A large part of the intelligence section of the 5th Marines



FIRST PLANE TO LAND on Henderson Field was a Navy PBY-5A which evacuated two wounded Marines on 12 August 1942.

likewise was taken, and, since the patrol as it was finally organized, contained only 25 persons, it seems obvious that one result of the last-minute changes had been to reduce the combat effectiveness of the group.

As a result of these changes, the patrol did not depart from the perimeter until 1800 on 12 August,¹² and the landing, of course, was made after dark, at about 2200. As far as can be determined at this time, Goettge planned to land the group west of Point Cruz. On the day of departure he had been warned specifically against attempting to land between the

¹² *Final Report*, Phase III, p. 6. Another important, and happier event took place on 12 August. The first American plane to use the newly won air strip landed and took off with two wounded Marines—a method of evacuation that was to be used throughout the campaign with outstanding success. The plane was a PBY-5A, number 05045, and was piloted by Lieutenant W. S. Sampson, USN. *Ibid.*, Annex B, p. 2.

mouth of the Matanikau River and the point, for a patrol action three days before had established beyond question the fact that strong enemy positions commanded that area.¹³

As a matter of fact, the landing was made on the very beach against which Goettge had been warned—darkness and lack of familiarity with the terrain led to the error. The patrol got ashore without difficulty and the landing craft withdrew. As the men began working their way inland, however, they were taken under intense fire at once from rifles and machine guns, and by shortly after midnight the group, with the exception of three men sent out to report the event, was wiped out.

The three survivors arrived at intervals of about an hour, beginning at 0530 on 13 August. At that time Sergeant Charles C. Arndt came to the perimeter with the news that the patrol had encountered the enemy immediately after landing. He had been sent back at 2230. A relief patrol (Company A, 5th Marines) was sent out immediately by boat. As it made its way up the coast, the two other survivors came in—Corporal Joseph Spaulding at 0725 and Platoon Sergeant Frank L. Few at 0800. They brought word of the wiping out of the party.¹⁴

Company A, meanwhile, landed west of Point Cruz, at what was thought to be the scene of the Goettge landing. After receiving a reinforcement in the form of two platoons of Company L, 5th Marines, and a light machine gun section, the group began moving east, toward the perimeter. Company A, coming along the coastal road, encountered minor resistance from enemy emplacements near the mouth of the Matanikau. It returned to the perimeter late in the evening of 13 August. Company L, with its attached light machine gun section, followed a route lying farther inland, and arrived at midday on 14 August, having been held back by diffi-

¹³ Letter, Colonel William J. Whaling to Commandant Marine Corps, 26 January 1949. The matter of warning given to Goettge prior to his departure was confirmed by Lieutenant Colonel Lyman D. Spurlock in an interview held 27 January 1949.

¹⁴ *Final Report*, Phase III, Annex J, p. 2.

cult terrain.¹⁵ Neither group found trace of the patrol.¹⁶

FIRST ACTION ALONG THE MATANIKAU

On 19 August, the day which saw an important patrol action near Tetera to the east as will be described, the first planned offensive beyond the perimeter was carried out. The fate of the Goettge patrol, and the data secured by the group which went in search of it, confirmed what had been surmised—that the enemy was in reasonably strong positions in the territory just west of the Matanikau River. It was, therefore, planned to attack and destroy the force.

The operation set the pattern for several attacks in the future, attacks which were to enjoy varying degrees of success. The assault was to be in the form of a three-pronged attack, supported by fires from the 2d, 3d, and 5th Battalions, 11th Marines, division artillery regiment.

Company B, 5th Marines, from a position at the mouth of the river, was to attack westward, across the river, while Company L, 5th Marines, after crossing the river far up stream at 0800 on 18 August and cutting its way toward the mouth along the left bank, was to attack the area from inland on 19 August. Company I, in the meanwhile, after traveling by boat from the perimeter on 18 August to the small village of Kokumbona, which lay several miles to the west of Matanikau, was to cut off the retreat of the enemy to the west and clear out the village itself.¹⁷

The attack was partially successful. Com-

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 2 and 3.

¹⁶ According to official records, no trace was ever found of the group. Subsequent to 21 August, a patrol led by Lieutenant W. S. Sivertsen found a dispatch case containing Commander Pratt's equipment and a torn piece of clothing marked with Goettge's name. No identifiable remains were found, however, and the members of the ill-fated group continued to be classified as missing in action. Letter, Sivertsen to Commandant Marine Corps, 17 February 1949.

¹⁷ *Final Report*, Phase III, pp. 6 and 7. *Ibid.*, Annex J, p. 4.

pany L, traveling through the difficult inland terrain, achieved something of a surprise, and, pressing home its attack, succeeded in taking the village of Matanikau. Company B, meanwhile, prevented from crossing the river by a heavy volume of fire from the opposite bank, nevertheless filled a useful role—that



USING CAPTURED JAPANESE GUNS such as the 3-inch dual purpose weapon shown here, Marines of Company M, 5th Marines, duelled with a Japanese cruiser on 19 August. No hits were scored by either party.

of keeping the enemy active and alert on one front while an attack against his right flank was developing from inland. Company I, traveling by boat, was shelled enroute by two enemy destroyers and one cruiser standing far out. No casualties resulted from this attack, although several near misses fell among the boats. The enemy craft remained all morning, finally being driven off by two B-17's.¹⁸ Fire from light machine guns on the beach was encountered. Resistance was met after the company landed, but the village was assaulted with inconclusive results, the enemy retreating into the hills with all weapons instead of making a stand. All companies returned to the perimeter, having inflicted

¹⁸ Letter, LtCol W. H. Barba to Commandant Marine Corps, 28 January 1948. The cruiser was fired upon by the 1st Platoon, Company M, 5th Marines, under 2dLt Drew Barrett, using two captured 3-inch dual purpose naval guns. The platoon fired 20 rounds, all short. The cruiser bracketed the position with a starboard salvo, but there were no casualties.

losses in excess of 65 killed, and an unknown number wounded, on the enemy, while suffering the comparatively small loss of four killed and 11 wounded.

THE BRUSH PATROL

The second patrol, and the one which ultimately was the more important from a combat standpoint, had a curious origin. The area assigned to the 1st Marines for patrolling and reconnaissance lay east and southeast of the perimeter. The plains in the vicinity of the Lunga widen out to the eastward, so that near Tetere, for instance, there is a belt of grassy land nearly eight miles wide. It had been known for some time that it was possible to build an airfield there—at one time there was suspicion that the Japanese were actually engaged in building one—and that there was a plan to proceed with initial surveying of the district preparatory to such construction.

On 12 August, a group of engineers set out from the perimeter with the mission of beginning that survey, and accompanying them, for purposes of security, was one platoon of Company A, 1st Marines, under command of Second Lieutenant John J. Jachym. On 13 August, while the group was passing through a small native village, it was greeted by a young Catholic priest, Arthur C. Duhamel of Methuen, Massachusetts. He said that there were rumors of an enemy force farther to the east, along the coast.¹⁹ No definite details could be obtained, and in view of the nature of the information, Lieutenant Jachym decided to return to the perimeter, report the news, and, if necessary, return with a larger body to verify it.

Two days later, a partial verification of Duhamel's advice was made by Captain W. F. M. Clemens, a coastwatcher and former official in the British Solomon Islands Civil Government. Accompanied by Sergeant Ma-

¹⁹ He probably referred to the Japanese coastwatcher station at Taivu, set up in June or July by Yoshimoto. That small group continued to operate until some time in October.

jour Vouza²⁰ and several other natives, Clemens arrived at the command post on 14 August, and reported that he had received news of an enemy radio station near Taivu. On the same day, Admiral Turner advised Vandegrift that the Japanese were planning an attack in force on the perimeter.²¹

At 0700 on 19 August, therefore, the patrol was formed and set out toward Tetere. It consisted this time of a part of Company A, 1st Marines, and was led by Captain Charles H. Brush. Its route lay along the coastal road that leads from the Lunga to the Koli Point-Tetere area. By noon the group had come to a small village, and Captain Brush ordered a halt there for food and for a short respite from the heat. Someone recalled, however, that, a short distance farther along the road, there was said to be a grove of fruit trees, and, with the idea of securing this supplement to the meager canned rations, the company took to the road once more.²²

Midway between the two villages, the scouts preceding the main body caught sight of a group of Japanese traveling westward between the road and the beach. The group consisted of four officers and 30 men, not in military formation. Brush's patrol attacked frontally with part of its strength, with an enveloping movement of one platoon, led by Jachym, around the right flank. Fifty-five minutes of action resulted in the wiping out of the enemy force—31 of them were killed,

²⁰ Vouza had first appeared at the mouth of the Tenaru River on 10 August, accompanied by several friends. A retired Sergeant Major of the native constabulary, he spoke good English, and was taken at once to the perimeter and then to the command post. During his absence, his friends instructed the Marines in the useful art of husking a coconut with three strokes of a machete—the first gambit in a relationship that was to be of tremendous value to the Marines, and that was to have unforeseen economic and political repercussions among the natives. Letter, Hawley C. Waterman to Commandant Marine Corps, 17 January 1949.

²¹ *D-3 Journal*, 14 August, messages 12, 13, and 14.

²² Details of the Jachym and Brush patrols were taken from *Final Report*, Phase III, p. 9, supplemented by information given by Jachym to the Historical Section during an interview in the autumn of 1944.

and three escaped into the jungle. The Marine patrol lost three killed and three wounded.

An inspection of the dead revealed a number of interesting details. There was an inordinate amount of rank, for one thing, and there was the additional fact that when I had been surprised by Brush's patrol, the enemy group had been at work laying communication wire—an almost certain indication of the presence or expected early arrival of a much larger force.

A further, and more immediately disturbing detail, was that of the nature of some of the documentary material found with the bodies. Major (then Captain) Brush has the following remarks to make:

With a complete lack of knowledge of Japanese on my part, the maps the Japanese had of our positions were so clear as to startle me. They showed our weak spots all too clearly. For example, the First Battalion, First Marines, had been preparing positions on the right of the Second Battalion, but were not occupying these positions. On the right of the First Battalion there was nothing. This fact was clearly shown on the Japanese map which I inspected on the scene of the patrol action.²³

Subsequent translation of the documents which were rushed back to the perimeter by runner at once, confirmed the impression made upon Brush—that the enemy group was the advance party of a much larger force.

BEGINNING OF AIR SUPPORT

It was realized that a successful defense of the island, and a consequent denial of that island to the enemy, depended directly upon the ability of the Marines, to develop and use the airfield.²⁴ Until the field was completed, and fighter and dive bomber planes brought in, the Division would continue to be at the mercy of any air or naval attack that the enemy cared to deliver.

The 13 days which elapsed between the landing and the arrival of the first combat planes were marked by daily air raids as well as by attacks from surface craft, submarines

²³ Letter, Major Charles H. Brush, Jr., to Commandant Marine Corps, 15 January 1949.

²⁴ *Final Report*, Phase III, pp. 2 and 3.



90mm ANTI-AIRCRAFT GUNS of the 3d Defense Battalion emplaced at Henderson Field forced Japanese bombers to 25,000 feet while Marines of the 1st Engineer Battalion labored to finish the strip. This picture was taken after the field had become fully operational.

destroyers, and, from time to time, cruisers. Defenses against these attacks were scanty and ineffective. The anti-aircraft weapons emplaced around the airfield by the 3d Defense Battalion succeeded only in keeping the attacking planes at a reasonably high altitude. Enemy bombing was fairly accurate even from the 25,000 feet level.²⁵ There were occasions on which 75mm half-tracks succeeded in driving off enemy submarines.²⁶

A survey of the airfield conducted on 8 August revealed the fact that about 2,600 feet of the runway, which was 160 feet wide, could be completed within two days and that the remaining stretch of approximately 1,178 feet could be made ready for use within a week.²⁷ Actual construction was begun the next day, 9 August, when the 1st Engineer Battalion began operating. Supply and equipment, however, were at a premium. It is estimated that *Fomalhaut*, carrying most of the earth moving equipment, departed when only

15 percent of her cargo had been discharged.²⁸

The withdrawal of the transports had left the Marine forces with only a part of their initially scanty supplies ashore. Ammunition supply was adequate, but the situation in the matter of food was serious. Even with the acquisition of a considerable stock of rice and canned food from the captured Japanese area,²⁹ supplies were so short that it was necessary on 12 August to begin a program of two meals per day. There was a similar shortage of defensive material, barbed wire (of which only 18 spools were landed), and entrenching tools and sand-bags.

The most serious shortage of all, however, from the point of view of the engineers who were charged with the completion of the airfield, was that of specialized equipment necessary for the task. No power shovels had been landed, nor dump trucks. One bulldozer,

²⁵ Letter, LtCol Alonzo D. Gorham to Commandant Marine Corps, 9 February 1949.

²⁶ *D-3 Journal*, entry 17 of 11 August.

²⁷ *Final Report*, Phase III, Annex C, p. 5. This annex gives an excellent account of the amount of enemy equipment found and put to use, especially in the building of the air strip.

²⁸ This smaller stretch was completed by 12 August and the full length by 18 August. *Final Report*, Phase III, p. 3.

property of the Pioneer Battalion, had come ashore, but was not immediately available for work on the airstrip.³⁰ Here again, however, good fortune played a deciding role, for it was found that the Japanese equipment which had been landed for the purpose of constructing an airfield was largely undamaged and usable, although antiquated.

Concurrently with the establishment of the perimeter, the strenuous efforts of the under-equipped engineers, and the probing patrol activities of the rifle regiments, a new and significant phase of the campaign began. The first elements of Marine Corps aviation began moving toward the island.

On 12 August, the USS *Long Island*, with VMF-223 and VMSB-232—Marine fighter squadron and dive bomber squadron respectively—was about to depart from Suva, where she had taken refuge upon receipt of the news of the Battle of Savo. She was expected to arrive in position to fly off the planes of the two squadrons about 16 August.

The ground echelon of Marine Air Group (MAG) 23, however, was embarked on the USS *William Ward Burroughs*, which was not scheduled to arrive at Guadalcanal until 19 or 20 August. This circumstance would create a problem, for although there was some aviation gasoline at the newly com-

³⁰ Letter, LtCol Henry H. Crockett to Commandant Marine Corps, 10 June 1949. This lone bulldozer was eulogized long after the war by Colonel Ballance, already quoted above. In the matter of this piece of equipment, he has the following eloquent passage in his letter to the Commandant dated 12 February 1949:

One R-4 bulldozer—actually an angle-dozer—was landed by the 1st Pioneer Battalion, and the yeoman service performed by this lone piece of power equipment in the hands of one Corporal Cates, its skilled proprietor—no one else was allowed to operate it—seems worthy of a place in the record. Cates drove that dozer from morning till night, he automatically ceased whatever task he was performing when condition RED sounded and headed for the airfield ready to fill bomb craters on the strip. He buried dead Japs, worked the roads and prepared bridge bank seats, cleared the Kukum beach for unloading operations, pulled, tugged, and towed all manner of things. That lovely R-4 finally fell apart like the one hoss shay, never to run again, some time in late October.

pleted airfield—400 drums of fuel which the Japanese had stocked in anticipation of the scheduled arrival of their own planes on 17 August—the absence of trained ground crews would make it impossible to operate the fighters and dive bombers.

Admiral McCain (CTF 63 and COMAIR-SOPAC) found his way out of this dilemma thanks to the presence of CUB-1 at Espiritu Santo. On 13 August he ordered Major C. H. Hayes, executive officer of VMO-251, to proceed to Guadalcanal with the aviation component of this unit in order to provide ground facilities for the squadrons when they landed. Hayes accordingly alerted the senior naval officer of the CUB—Ensign George W. Polk³¹—and prepared to embark his detail.

The embarkation of the five officers and 118 navy enlisted was strangely reminiscent of the embarkation of the 1st Division. Recently arrived, the unit had only begun to unload its gear when, shortly before noon on the 13th, it was notified that it would embark that night and sail at once for Guadalcanal. It would use the four destroyer transports of Transdiv 12 for the movement.

This posed the problem of space upon that of transfer of cargo. Each APD could receive only 30 tons of cargo. Essential material only could be taken, much of which was either difficult of access or entirely unreachable in the holds of the ships which had brought it. The total supply carried northward by the four craft included as principal items 400 drums of aviation gasoline, 32 drums of aviation lubricant, 282 bombs ranging from 100 to 500 pounds, belted ammunition, and miscellaneous critically important tools and parts. The men carried light packs and arms only—it was thought that rations, mess and organizational equipment, medical supplies, and tentage could be supplied by the 1st Division quartermaster.

Hayes was briefed hurriedly by McCain

³¹ Polk was killed in Greece in 1948 while serving as a news correspondent. His murder attracted world wide attention, and at the time of the preparation of this monograph—March 1949—no acceptable solution of the mystery surrounding his death had been reached.

prior to setting out. His instructions directed him to expedite completion of the airfield (General Vandegrift had already declared it to be usable by fighter planes), prepare camouflage or concealment for the planes with particular attention to concealment for the SBD's, and provide ground service for the incoming aircraft until the arrival of the regular ground crews.³² His last act before going aboard was to conduct a frantic—and successful—search for chamois to be used in straining fuel from drums. This indispensable material he carried aboard under his arm.

The APD's departed on schedule, arriving off Kukum after dark on 15 August. Passengers and supplies were put on the beach, and next day CUB-1 took over from the 1st Engineering Battalion its share of the task of making ready the field.³³

By 19 August, in spite of daily raids by enemy aircraft, work on the airstrip was completed, and the field was ready to receive the planes which arrived the next day.³⁴

On 20 August, from a point 200 miles south of the island 19 planes of VMF-223 (F4F-4's led by Major John L. Smith) and 12 dive bombers of VMSB-232 (SBD-3's under Lieutenant Colonel Richard C. Mangrum) took off from the flight deck of the *Long Island*. Beginning at 1330, the flight ended with the safe arrival of all planes at Henderson Field³⁵ at 1700.³⁶ Within eight hours of their arrival the first great counterattack of the Japanese was thrown back, and within 12 hours the newly arrived planes were performing their first mission in support of the ground troops—patrolling the beaches east of the Tenaru to

cut off any attempt at escape by the remnants of the enemy force which Pollock's 2d Battalion, 1st Marines had cut to pieces at the mouth of Alligator Creek (the "Tenaru").³⁷

The Marine planes were followed, on 22 and 27 August, by elements of the 67th Fighter Squadron, Army Air Force. These 14 planes were P-400's, inadequate machines that could not do justice to the degree of training and spirit of their pilots. Unable to attain, and operate at, sufficient altitude, they eventually undertook close-support missions.³⁸

BATTLE OF THE TENARU

Presence of enemy forces to both the east and the west had now been established, and an attack upon the perimeter was inevitable. The problem remained of how best to prepare to meet such an attack.

The Lunga defenses had already assumed the basic form which they were to retain throughout the campaign, but, within the period of the past week, a considerable amount of improvement had been effected. The defenses on the east or right flank, as we have seen, were formed along the west bank of Alligator Creek. This flank extension had been lengthened to about 3,000 yards.³⁹ It was planned to clear off the terrain by burning and by cutting, and to construct permanent fortifications, but there had not been sufficient time for such development.

General Vandegrift now had five rifle battalions available for manning the defenses. The entire 1st Marines was present, but the 5th Marines still lacked its 2d Battalion, which had been detached prior to D-day to the Assistant Division Commander for service on Tulagi. Of the available battalions, four

³² SBD's, according to Admiral McCain's instructions, were to be used only against ships of cruiser size or better, and were to be kept well concealed until such time as that class of target presented itself.

³³ All details of the movement of CUB-1 from Espiritu Santo were obtained from Colonel Charles H. Hayes, USMC, by letter dated 8 February 1949.

³⁴ *Final Report*, Phase III, p. 5.

³⁵ The airstrip had been named for Major Lofton R. Henderson, Marine air hero of the Battle of Midway, by General Vandegrift.

³⁶ *War Diary*, Marine Air Group 23 (hereinafter WD, MAG 23, p. 1. MCR.

³⁷ WD, MAG 23, p. 2.

³⁸ "One of these planes bore the name of 'Corky'. Perched on the west end of Henderson Field through bombing, artillery, and naval gunfire [it] survived to take the air on daily sortie. As long as 'Corky' stayed in there, many a young Marine felt that he could go on too." Letter, Wieseman to CMC.

³⁹ *Final Report*, Phase III, pp. 10 and 11.

were committed to beach defenses and one was held in reserve.

Being reasonably certain of the existence of a Japanese force to the east, the Division Commander found two possible courses of action open. The first of these, which consisted of sending the single reserve battalion (1st Battalion, 1st Marines) eastward to meet and destroy the enemy was rejected almost at once, since it depended upon the accuracy of the premises that the enemy had already landed and could be dealt with by one battalion. Also, there was no assurance whatever that the Japanese would not attempt an assault from the westward, a direct frontal assault, or indeed a combination of the two. Such a contingency would require the presence within the perimeter of every Marine capable of bearing arms.

The second course, which was actually adopted, consisted of strengthening all defenses in every way possible to a force which was inadequately equipped with defensive materials, and to institute and continue an intensive program of patrolling in the direction whence it was expected an attack would be launched. In this way, it was hoped, the hostile forces could be located, fixed, and their intentions more precisely divined.

Implementation of this program was begun at once. Native scouts operating under the direction of Captain Clemens assisted the Marine forces in active patrolling as far east as the Nalimbiu River. Day observation posts were set up in the vicinity of the Tenaru. The latter were withdrawn by night and in their place a system of listening posts was established in the neighborhood of the Tenaru and a small stream closer to the perimeter, known as the Block Four River.⁴⁰

A study of enemy documents which was begun during the Guadalcanal campaign and carried on for many months after the close of the campaign, indicates that the attack on Guadalcanal by the Marines had caused serious disruption of Japanese plans.⁴¹ It appears that such plans envisaged a two-Army attack on Port Moresby in southeastern New Guinea. The attack was to be mounted from

⁴⁰ *Final Report*, Phase III, p. 11.

Davao in the southern Philippines and was to be carried out by the 17th and 18th Armies. The unexpected Fleet Marine Force landing upon Guadalcanal, however, caused the enemy to withdraw from their projected assault the 17th Army (less one division). This weakened army was thereupon earmarked for an attack upon the newly established Marine positions.

The first large Japanese reinforcement to reach Guadalcanal consisted of approximately one reinforced battalion of the 28th Infantry Regiment, a 7th Division unit, under the command of Colonel Kiyono Ichiki. This force, which had been detached for duty with the Imperial Navy in the attempted but unsuccessful occupation of Midway, was returning to Japan for rehabilitation on 7 August. Orders from Lieutenant General Hyakutake, commanding general of the 17th Army, intercepted the unit and brought it to Truk, where it arrived on 12 August. There it received orders to embark, pass to Guadalcanal, assault and retake the area held by the 1st Marine Division.⁴²

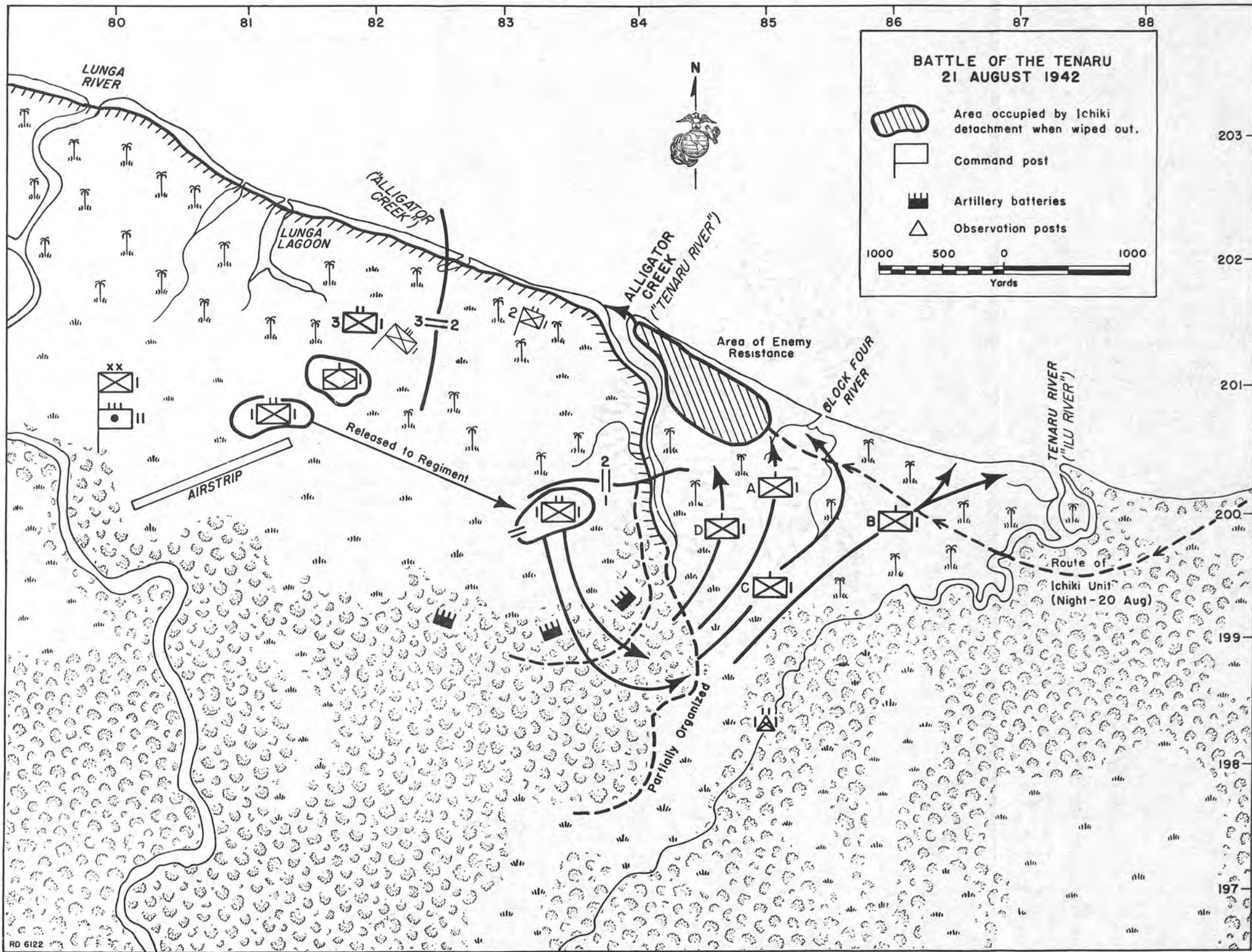
Accordingly, Ichiki embarked his battalion reinforced by engineers and artillery on six new destroyers—*Arashi*, *Hagikaze*, *Hamakaze*, *Tamikaze*, *Urukaze*, and *Kagero*. The force passed down to the island without incident, and landed near Taivu on 18 August.⁴³

⁴¹ *USAFISPA Report*, p. 8, and manuscript prepared by Captain William H. Whyte on enemy order of battle in the Solomon Islands. (Subsequently published in *Marine Corps Gazette*, in July and August, 1945 as "Hyakutake Meets the Marines.")

⁴² For details of this unit's planned role in the occupation of Midway, see *Marines at Midway*, cited above in Chapter I. It bears mention parenthetically at this point that the strength of the 1st Marine Division was — and continued for some time to be — badly underestimated by the Japanese.

Ichiki is sometimes erroneously called Ikki. Although both readings of the name are possible, in this case Ichiki is the correct rendering. (Confirmed by Lt Roger Pineau, USNR, in Tokyo, June, 1949.)

⁴³ The landing of the Ichiki Unit had been preceded by one day by the landing of elements of the 5th Yokosuka Special Naval Landing Force, which came ashore on 17 August near Tassafaronga, west of Point Cruz and far removed from the perimeter. *USAFISPA Report*, pp. 4 and 5 was also used as a source for this information.



Ichiki then sent out a reconnaissance party to explore the territory lying between the point of landing and the Marine positions.⁴⁴ This patrol, as we have seen, was intercepted and wiped out by Captain Brush's patrol on 19 August.

Midnight of 20 August found the 1st Marines in position around the right flank of the perimeter, with the 2d Battalion in the crucial position at the mouth of the river, its



LOSER AT TENARU. Col Kiyono Ichiki, commander originally designated to take Midway, instead made the first counter-landing against Marines at Guadalcanal. Pitting one battalion against five, Ichiki's mission was suicidal in concept, execution, and outcome.

right flank extending several hundred yards up-stream. The 3d Battalion, on the left of the 2d, held the beach line from that point to the mouth of the Lunga, while the 1st Battalion, not in prepared positions, was located to the right rear of the 2d Battalion, in

⁴⁴ USAFISPA Report, p. 5.

division reserve. Listening posts from the 2d Battalion were established in the territory forward of the lines.

Some time after midnight⁴⁵ these forward elements began falling back on the main positions, bringing word that there appeared to be a rather large enemy force in the neighborhood of the Tenaru River. Flares had been seen, and sounds of movement of men had been heard, but no visual contact with the enemy body had been made.

At about the same time, a dramatic confirmation of the presence of enemy to the eastward occurred when Sergeant Major Vouza (retired) of the Native Constabulary appeared, badly wounded, at the command post of the 2d Battalion, 1st Marines. He had been caught by the Japanese on 18 August in his village several miles to the east of the perimeter. When he refused to give them information, he was tortured and left for dead. He made his way, at night, through the enemy force and arrived at the mouth of Alligator Creek in time to tell Lieutenant Colonel Edwin A. Pollock, the battalion commander, of its presence.⁴⁶

Vouza's own account of his capture has epic qualities. The following extract is from a letter written by Vouza to Hector MacQuarrie, who had known him during the early 1920's:

Well, I was caught by the Japs and one of the Japanese Naval Officer questioned me but I was refuse to answer & I was bayoneted by a long sword twice on my chest, through my thought, a cutted the side of my tongue & I was got up from the enemies & walked through the American front line & there my Officer Mr. Clemens who D. C. at Guadalcanal during the War, later he is Major & his Clerk a native from New Georgia he was Staff Sgt his name was Daniel Pule. Both got the reports information from the Marine Division at the Front Line by one of the Colonial of the American Marine Div. his name was Col. Buckley that I was wounded. So then boths Major Clemens & Staff Sgt. Daniel Pule they came up to the front line & took me to the American Hostpital at Lunga Guadalcanal & there they done the treatment and the wounded was healthed up, only 12 days I was in Hospital.

⁴⁵ *Final Report*, Phase IV, Annex G. This account places the beginning of the night's activity at 2030, 20 August, when the first flare was seen.

⁴⁶ Interview with Colonel Pollock, 12 March 1948.



SGTMJAJ VOUZA, British Solomon Islands Constabulary, as he first appeared to Marines. Vouza was captured by the Japanese, tortured and repeatedly bayoneted, but refused to divulge information. Despite serious wounds he escaped, and survived not only to conduct many patrols but to receive U.S. and British decorations.

After I was discharged from the Hospital I had to do my fighting with the Japs & paid back all what they have done with me & now, here I'm I, still alive today. . . .⁴⁷

No serious apprehension seems to have been felt by Colonel Cates, the regimental commander at this news of enemy activity.⁴⁸ At about 0300, however, a sentry posted on the west bank of Alligator Creek—then believed to be the Tenaru River—heard sounds of motion on the far bank of the river. He challenged, and, when there was no answer, he fired.

By this time Colonel Ichiki had assembled his force in positions on the narrowing point

⁴⁷ Letter, ex-SgtMaj Vouza, Headman, Tasimboko District, to Hector MacQuarrie, 6th May, 1948. For his heroism, Vouza was given the Silver Star by the United States, and the George Medal by Great Britain.

⁴⁸ At this point in its chronological account of the campaign, the *Final Action Report* says, "This was followed by a small amount of rifle fire, but neither fact was considered of particular significance as minor affrays with small enemy parties were of almost nightly occurrence." *Final Report*, Phase IV, p. 1, and Annex G.

of land on the right bank of the river. At 0310 there was a sudden and violent attack by a group of approximately 200 Japanese, who rushed the sand bar at the mouth of the stream in a column.⁴⁹ In spite of the concentrated fire from rifles, emplaced machine guns, and cannister-firing 37mm cannon, and in spite of the extremely heavy casualties immediately inflicted upon them, a part of the group succeeded in gaining the left bank and in overrunning a few emplacements. A quick counterattack by Company G, 1st Marines, which had been in reserve behind and slightly to the right of the point of attack, cleared the left bank before the enemy had time to consolidate his gains.⁵⁰

The main force of the Ichiki unit remained on the point without giving any direct support to the attack while it was being delivered. Immediately it became evident that the assault had failed, however, the enemy began delivering fire from his mortars and 70mm infantry cannon, in an attempt to reduce the Marine position.⁵¹ The Japanese then initiated a frontal assault on the perimeter—a large group, about the size of a company, went out into the sea beyond the breakers and came directly ashore against the left flank of the 2d Battalion. This attack, however, was likewise shattered at the water's edge by heavy fire from machine guns and from 37mm guns loaded with cannister.⁵²

The Japanese artillery and mortar fire from the right bank of the river spoke eloquently of a fairly large force, and, at about 0400, the 75mm batteries of the 3d Battalion,

⁴⁹ The position was not wired in. *Ibid.*, p. 1 of narrative section. On 21 August C Company, 1st Engineer Battalion, wired in the positions of 2d Battalion, 1st Marines, laid a minefield and an anti-tank obstacle on the sandspit, and dug emplacements. This work was done under intermittent enemy small arms fire, and was completed on 22 August. (Letter, LtCol Henry H. Crockett to Commandant Marine Corps, 10 January 1949.)

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁵¹ *Final Report*, Phase IV, p. 2.

⁵² Details given by Col. Pollock in an interview 12 March 1948. Col. Pollock is of the opinion that all phases of the action during night of 20-21 August took place somewhat earlier than the times quoted in the *Final Report* and subsidiary reports.

11th Marines, laid down a concentration in that area. A fire-fight of great intensity and at close range developed, with the Marine forces enjoying the advantage of a partial enfilading of the enemy position by fire from weapons emplaced on the projecting left bank of the river. A second artillery concentration was placed on the enemy force at about 0515.⁵³

In the meanwhile, General Vandegrift decided to execute an enveloping movement, since most of the enemy appeared to be concentrated within a reasonably small area. The 1st Battalion, 1st Marines, (Lieutenant Colonel Lenard B. Cresswell), reverting from division reserve to regimental control, was ordered orally by Cates to go upstream, cross the river, and attack to the northwest along the right bank, thereby taking the enemy on his rear and his left flank.⁵⁴

The movement was an unqualified success. The battalion crossed the dry upper stream bed of the creek, debouching from the jungle onto a grassy plain 3000 yards inland. At this point it assumed the formation which it was to hold for the rest of the action. Companies A and C, each with one platoon of Company D (Weapons) attached struck out straight for the beach at an azimuth of 15° to allow the force to come in well behind the enemy pocket.

Company B, with the mortar platoon and one machine gun platoon of Company D attached, formed the reserve. Operating under the battalion executive officer, this company moved toward the beach with its right flank resting on the left bank of the Tenaru—or Ilu, as it was then called. As it moved toward the mouth of the river, the company left details of squad size in position along the bank to impede any attempt of the Japanese to withdraw across the river. The rest of Company D, operating as riflemen, also moved north with its left flank on the right bank of Alligator Creek. Headquarters Company

moved generally in the rear of the assault companies.

Immediately upon reaching the beach, Companies A and C swung to the left and began moving toward Alligator Creek (the "Tenaru"). Several attempts were made by the enemy to break through the force that was compressing them into an ever decreasing area. A thrust toward the east, along the beach, was stopped by elements of Company C. Another, up the right bank of Alligator Creek (the "Tenaru") ran into Company D and was wiped out.⁵⁵

An attack by light tanks, advancing across the bar, was moderately successful, one tank being lost to enemy mines and weapons. Marine riflemen thereupon closed with the survivors of the enemy force and exterminated them. The action concluded at 1700, after 16 hours of constant fighting.

The Japanese suffered almost total casualties in a group that numbered about 900 men. A few stragglers managed to escape into the hills to the south, and 15 enemy were taken prisoner. The cost to the Marines was 34 killed and 75 wounded.⁵⁶

While Pollock's battalion was holding its positions at the mouth of the river and Cresswell was getting into position on the enemy's left flank and rear, four pilots of VMF-223, led by Major Smith, made their first interception. At 1207 they engaged a flight of six enemy fighters near Savo Island, and the leader scored the first of his many

⁵³ Details of the movements of Cresswell's battalion were obtained from a letter, Lieutenant Colonel Marion A. Fawcett to Commandant, Marine Corps, 8 February 1949, and from an interview with Cresswell in November 1948. Cresswell says that it was intended to have his movement supported by tanks, but that they found it impossible to cross the stream bed.

⁵⁴ The 2d Battalion, 1st Marines which bore the brunt of assault, suffered most heavily, losing 25 killed and 44 wounded. Seven were killed and 13 wounded in the 1st Battalion of the same regiment, while the Special Weapons Battalion, a Division unit, lost two killed and 14 wounded. One man was wounded in the 1st Marines' Regimental Weapons Company and three in Headquarters and Service Company. *Final Report*, Phase IV, Annex G.

⁵⁵ *Final Report*, Phase IV, p. 2.

⁵⁶ Details of the movements of the 1st Battalion as given here were supplied by Col. Cresswell during interviews held in November and December 1947.



THE JAPANESE SUFFERED TOTAL CASUALTIES at the Battle of the Tenaru. These former members of the Ichiki Unit had originally been allocated for the capture of Midway but instead made their first contact with Marines on Guadalcanal.

kills. This was the only enemy plane shot down in the engagement, which cost the Marines one plane when Technical Sergeant Johnnie D. Lindley crash-landed upon return to the airstrip.⁵⁷

While the preliminary gambits which led up to the Battle of the Tenaru were being performed, the Japanese likewise deployed forces for a second attempt to build up their strength on Guadalcanal. On 19 August, the

⁵⁷ The psychological effect of the arrival of friendly planes is indicated in the following anecdote contributed by LtCol Joseph N. Renner. When he arrived on 30 August, he was told by a Marine of the 1st Division that the planes had done a wonderful job. The Marine was loud in his praise of "that guy Smith" who, he assured Renner with the utmost sincerity, had shot down at least fifty planes—he hadn't heard anything within the past few days, and the score perhaps was larger. Interview, LtCol Renner, December 1948.

day upon which Ichiki's reconnaissance patrol was wiped out, the rear echelon of his force departed Rabaul en route to Guadalcanal. About 700 of this unit were embarked in four old destroyer transports (Patrol Boats #1, #2, #34, and #35), together with 800 "marines" of the 5th Yokosuka Special Landing Force on the converted cruiser *Kinryu Maru*, screened by light cruiser *Jintsu* and three destroyers.

This force, in itself unable to cope with anything in the nature of an air attack, was covered by two task forces, each built around carriers, that operated generally to the eastward of the transports. Closer in there was the seaplane carrier *Chitose*, fitted with four catapults and carrying 22 float planes.⁵⁸

To counter this attempt, two United States task forces were operating in an area gen-

⁵⁸ *Robinson ms.*

erally southeast of the lower Solomons and conducting searches to the northwest. Each of these forces likewise was formed around a carrier, *Enterprise* forming the nucleus of one and *Saratoga* that of the other.

Contact with the enemy was made first on the morning of 23 August, two days after Ichiki and his battalion had been annihilated. The contact, made by long distance reconnaissance plane, was not developed. Marine planes from Henderson Field, attempting to follow it up, were not successful because of a heavy overcast, and returned to the field. They were followed by 35 Navy planes from *Saratoga*—29 dive bombers and six torpedo planes—which landed just at nightfall, at 1700.⁵⁹ The night was marked by a shelling of the perimeter by the enemy destroyer *Kagero*, one of the ships which had brought the Ichiki unit to the island.⁶⁰

Next day—24 August—the enemy task force was located and attacked. *Ryujo* was hit repeatedly and finally went out of control and burned. *Chitose*, also hit, was able to make her way, badly damaged, to Rabaul.⁶¹ While the ships were under attack, Henderson Field was struck by 16 single engine car-

rier type bombers, escorted by 12 Zeros. The enemy planes were attacked, in turn, at 1420 by F4F-4's of MAG-23, which shot down 10 bombers and six Zeros at a loss to themselves of three pilots missing and one wounded. Minor damage only was done to the airstrip.⁶²

On the night of 24 August, the persistent *Kagero* returned again to shell the perimeter, accompanied by four sister destroyers—*Mutsuki*, *Yuyoi*, *Isokaze*, and *Kawakaze*. Once again there was only minor damage to the perimeter.⁶³

The *Enterprise*, meanwhile, had also been struck and damaged by enemy air attacks to such extent that she had to withdraw from the action. This ship casualty resulted in an accretion of strength by the Guadalcanal Air Force. Flight 300, airborne when the carrier retired, took refuge at 1845 on Henderson Field. It consisted of 11 SBD-3's (6 from VS-5, 5 from VB-6) under command of Lieutenant Turner Caldwell, USN.⁶⁴

Enemy transports, whose movement toward Guadalcanal had precipitated the action, continued on their assigned mission. They were attacked by 12 SBD's from the Guadalcanal airstrip, and the cruiser *Jintsu* was hit, damaged, and forced to withdraw to

⁵⁹ The Navy planes left next morning, leaving behind them the welcome gift of 27 1000-pound bombs. WD, MAG-23, p. 3.

⁶⁰ *Robinson ms.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² WD, MAG-23, entry 24 August.

⁶³ *Final Report*, Phase IV, Annex I, p. 4. Message sent 2358, 24 August. See also *Robinson ms.*, p. 3.

⁶⁴ WD, MAG-23, entry 24 August.



CARRIER TORPEDO PLANES joined MAG-23 in strikes from Henderson Field against Japanese task forces.

Truk for repairs. The auxiliary cruiser *Kinryu Maru* was hit, set afire, and abandoned, and a destroyer, the *Mutsuki*, was sunk by B-17's of the 11th Bombardment group, based on Espiritu Santo, while standing by her.⁶⁵

The untoward results of the attempted reinforcement were such as to force the Japanese to abandon the effort. Surviving units of the enemy transport force withdrew to the Shortland Islands.

Some time immediately after the defeat of the Ichiki unit, the Japanese forces to the east of the perimeter committed the only atrocity against European civilians on Guadalcanal of which we have record. At an undetermined date late in August two priests, Father Arthur C. Duhamel, of whom we have heard above, and Father Henry Oude-Engberink were tortured and killed, as were Sister Sylvia, a French nun, and Sister Odilia, of Italy. The murders were witnessed by a third nun, Sister Edmée, also of France.

These people, all missionaries of the Society of Mary, had been on the island at the time of the Japanese invasion. They were stationed at the mission at Ruavatu, between the perimeter and Aola. Other members of the order were Father Michael McMahon at Visale, a mission near Cape Esperance and Father Emery De Klerk, a Dutch priest at Tangarare, on the south coast directly across

⁶⁵ *Campaigns*, USAFISPA, p. 111.

the island from Kokumbona. All of them had refused to leave their posts at the time the European colony at Tulagi was evacuated.

Prior to the coming of the Marines, they were not molested by the Japanese. After the American landings, however, the people at Visale were forced to go to Tangarare and then to the mountains. Duhamel and Oude-Engberink, however, remained at Ruavatu because of its remoteness from the scene of action. They were taken at that place by survivors of the Ichiki force led by Ishimoto,⁶⁶ the local spy, and were ordered to go through the American lines with tales of an overpowering Japanese force, in order to persuade the Marines to surrender or withdraw from the island.

When the two priests and the nuns refused to obey, on the grounds that they took no part in anything but religious matters, they were subjected to a week of torture and starvation. Since they remained obdurate, they were bayoneted. The bodies were buried in a native hut, whence they were recovered and buried by Father Frederic P. Gehring, at the time on duty with CUB-1.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ *Report of Police Boy*, 27 August 1942, MCR.

⁶⁷ All information regarding this group of missionaries was obtained from (1) records at the Marist College at Washington, (2) from correspondence with Father Frederic P. Gehring, C.M., of Philadelphia, and (3) *Saving the Solomons*, The Reverend Mother Mary Rose, S.M.S.M., pp. 121-125.



THE GUADALCANAL CAMPAIGN

CHAPTER V

The Battle of the Ridge

THE COMING of the first air units had an effect which would be difficult to reconcile with the size or the power of those units.¹

On 22 August, while Smith's fighters were providing air cover for the *Alhena*, newly arrived from Espiritu Santo with supplies and a part of the 2d Marines, the local air force, as we have seen, was augmented by the arrival of part of the 67th Fighter Squadron of the Army Air Force. On that day, five P-400's led by Captain Dale D. Brannan, arrived at the field after a series of long over water jumps from their training area near Noumea.² They were followed five days later by nine more.

¹ When the first two squadrons arrived on 20 August it was considered that a major turning point

in the operation had been reached. *Final Report*, Phase III, p. 3.

² WD, MAG-23, p. 2, and *History of the 67th Fighter Squadron*. These planes, designed for export to the European theater, had certain mechanical limitations (given in great detail in the history of the squadron) which made them unsuitable for high-level interception or combat. Their oxygen equipment, for example, called for high pressure bottles, unobtainable in the area. This meant that an absolute maximum altitude of 14,000 feet was imposed upon the willing and highly skilled pilots. Since the enemy bombers customarily used the 25,000 to 30,000 foot levels, the P-400's were useless as interceptors save on rare occasions, and they were therefore ordered to perform low level reconnaissance. From this limitation likewise arose the curious fact that they became outstanding ground support planes, functioning thus in a field of endeavor which had previously been considered almost exclusively one for Marine air.



FIVE ARMY P-400's ARRIVED, the first Army personnel or aircraft to reach Guadalcanal, on 22 August. First Army ground reinforcement's arrived in mid-October.



MARINE FIGHTER PLANES fell victim to many mishaps. This MAG-23 F4F-4 is being saved by bucket-brigade methods. Note bullet-pierced propeller-blades.

On 30 August, in the midst of an enemy raid which sank the destroyer *Calhoun*, two more squadrons of MAG-23 arrived, led by Lieutenant Colonel William J. Wallace, commanding officer of the group. When these 31 planes came in—19 F4F-4's of VMF-224 and 12 SBD-3's of VMSB-231—Wallace found that only four fighters of the first echelon remained operable. The rest had fallen victim to operational mishaps, enemy air raids, and combat damage.³ There was, therefore, a preponderance of pilots in all save the most recently arrived units—Brannan's 67th fighter squadron, for example, had only three planes left in operating condition of the total of 14 which had arrived at the island.⁴

By the end of the month the Cactus Air Force, as the mixed Marine, Navy, Army

Air Force Group had begun to be called, had grown to the following strength:

VMF-223 (Major John Smith)	-----10	planes
VMF-224 (Major Robert E. Galer)	-----19	planes
VMSB-231 (Major Leo R. Smith)	-----10	planes
VMSB-232 (Lieutenant Colonel Richard C. Mangrum)	-----12	planes
Flight 300 (Lieutenant T. F. Caldwell)	-----10	planes
67th Fighter Squadron (Captain Dale D. Brannan)	-----3	planes

During the ten days which had elapsed since the arrival of the first planes, a schedule of routine daily flights had been evolved. Four plane fighter patrols left the airstrip at 0545 and 1400 daily, returning at 0830 and 1830 respectively. Occasionally a mixed fighter-dive bomber squadron operated at night to the northwest in search of enemy shipping. So far, such flights had been without effect.⁵

³ *History of Marine Corps Aviation in World War II.*

⁴ *67th Squadron History.*

⁵ WD, MAG-23, 31 August 1942.



MAJ JOHN L. SMITH, first Marine ace of World War II, received the Medal of Honor for his feats as a Guadalcanal fighter pilot.

The matter of interception of enemy bombers, however, found the local air force more effective. A total of 56 enemy planes had been shot down during the ten days, as against a loss of 11 for the mixed Cactus Air Force. Concurrently with this combat, local planes had begun to fill another useful role—that of giving air cover and protection to the supply ships that were beginning to appear from the southeast. The *Alhena*, for instance, was protected during her approach and unloading on 30 August, when she brought in the forward echelon and the supplies of MAG-23.⁶

With the arrival of aircraft, the ground forces at Guadalcanal found themselves in a much improved position as regarded intelligence. While there was still far too little direct and accurate enemy information, it was now possible at least to get some idea of where and how he was landing. Aerial observation, to seaward at least, with its tremendous widening of the area capable of being scouted, brought invaluable, although frequently disquieting, information to General Vandegrift. It was learned, for instance, that landings of Japanese reinforcements were

⁶ WD, MAG-23, and *Final Report*, Phase IV, Annex H.

taking place both east and west of the perimeter. It was learned also that many of these landings were taking place at night.⁷ Marine Corps, Navy, and Army planes, few in number though they were, attacked at sight any Japanese shipping within range and inflicted damage that even the single-minded enemy was not prepared to suffer needlessly.

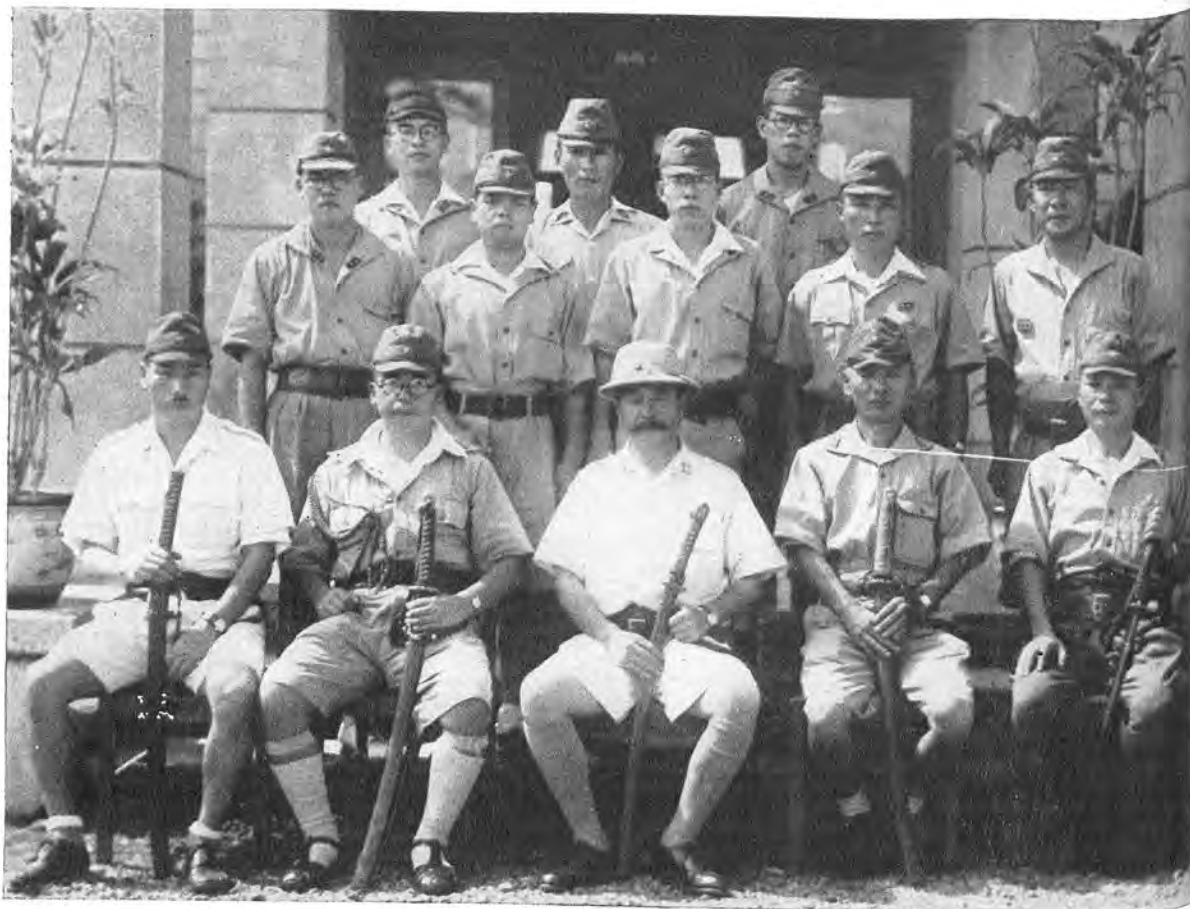
Three days after the defeat of the Ichiki detachment, for instance, patrol planes from the field participated in the Battle of the Eastern Solomons by attacking an enemy force of transports, cruisers and destroyers 150 miles northwest of the island, inflicting damage.⁸ Something over a week later, on

⁷ *Ibid.*, Phase IV, pp. 14 and 15.

⁸ *Final Report*, Phase IV, Annex H. Entry of 25 August. See also *D-3 Journal*, 25 August, message 14.



MARINE FIGHTERS heading out on intercept. Within ten days after arrival of Marine aviation at Henderson Field, 56 Japanese planes had been shot down—at a cost of 11 to the United States.



KAWAGUCHI BRIGADE HEADQUARTERS landed near Tasimboko from destroyers on 6 September. Forty-eight hours later, its base was attacked and destroyed by the 1st Raider Battalion. This picture, with mustachioed Major General Kawaguchi in center, was probably taken in the Philippines.

2 September, a second and larger force was attacked during the night while unloading supplies and troops well to the east of the perimeter, near where the Ichiki unit had landed.

Such was the information and the support obtained from the newly arrived air units. It became apparent that the enemy had not given over his plans for counterattack, and it became evident that he was so disposing major forces as to be able to launch separate or coordinated attacks from either the east or the west.

The Ichiki Unit was the first large enemy group to land successfully after the 1st Division assault; at least two previous attempts to land reinforcements had been made, how-

ever. On 8 August, at 2200, *Seiyo Maru*, with 414 men of the Sasebo 5th Special Naval Landing Force embarked, departed Rabaul for Guadalcanal. It was sunk with all hands while rounding Cape St. George. On 16 August a small detachment of the Yokosuka 5th Special Naval Landing Force was put ashore near Tassafaronga. Working its way eastward, this detachment found approximately 2000 men of the original garrison gathered near the line of the Matanikau River, where they had prepared positions.⁹

Late in the month, however, enemy forces began landing at night to the east and the west. On 29 August, four destroyers—

⁹ *Detailed Battle Report #6*. Fifth Air Attack Force, Base Air Force, Rabaul. WDC 160140/399.

Fubuki, *Shirayuki*, *Kawakaze*, and *Umikaze*—landed 900 men at Tassafaronga. Next night, the destroyer *Yudachi* landed the rest of the Ichiki unit at the same beach, while on 31 August, all the above craft, plus the destroyers *Amagiri*, *Kagero*, and *Suzukaze*, landed 1200 men of the Kawaguchi Brigade at Tasimboko, well to the east of the Tenaru River.¹⁰

Other landings took place in a similar manner, and by 6 September, the enemy strength on the island was distributed as follows:¹¹ East of the perimeter, 2990 men were between Taivu Point and Tasimboko, including Headquarters, 35th Infantry Brigade; main strength of the 124th Infantry; and the second echelon of the Ichiki detachment, with a few survivors of the first echelon. West of the perimeter, beyond Kokumbona, there were about 2200 men, consisting of parts of the 124th Infantry (being assembled by Colonel Oka), some special Naval Landing Force personnel, and the 11th and 13th Pioneers.

To the eastward of the perimeter there must have been almost a continuous nightly ship-to-shore movement. The Kawaguchi detachment—so called from the name of its commanding officer, Major General Kiyotake Kawaguchi, commanding the 35th Infantry Brigade—landed during that period as we have seen. Immediately after landing, engineering personnel attached to the unit began the monumental task of cutting a direct route across the rolling jungle country and into the foothills, across the innumerable hills and ravines and streams that lay between them and a bivouac area in the terrain south of the airfield, whence an attack against their objective could be launched from the terrain which dominated it.¹²

Parts of this information came from planes which patrolled the area constantly. Other parts came from the reports of patrols engaged in hunting down the scattered remnants of the Ichiki detachment and from messages brought in by natives whose gardens were being pillaged by the enemy.

¹⁰ *Robinson ms.*, p. 4.

¹¹ *USAFISPA Report*, p. 32, and *Whyte ms.*

¹² *Final Report*, Phase IV, p. 5, and Annex A.

The Marine forces, however, did not realize the size of the newly arrived enemy units, nor did they have any definite knowledge of their movements. It was only known that there was an increasing amount of activity and that it was becoming more and more difficult for patrols to penetrate the areas lying east of the perimeter.¹³

The information of the gathering of forces near Taivu, sketchy and incomplete though it was, was more detailed than that which existed about the enemy to the westward. One action had been fought against the units between Kokumbona and Matanikau, but, although heavy casualties had been inflicted upon those forces, the main body had made its way into the hills back of the beaches.

SECOND ACTION ALONG THE MATANIKAU

A second action was planned against the same area, consisting of a shore-to-shore movement on 27 August by the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines (Lieutenant Colonel William E. Maxwell), supported by the overland thrust of an additional company. Diversionary fire by the 11th Marines was to be directed to the area of the mouth of the Matanikau, to create the impression that an attack across the river was impending.¹⁴

Plans for the operation cannot be reconstructed at this time with any assurance of accuracy. Orders were given orally by the regimental to the battalion commander. The latter did not disclose them to his staff *in toto*, and there is a complete disagreement as to just what constituted the battalion's mission.¹⁵

¹³ *Final Report*, Phase IV, p. 6.

¹⁴ *Final Report*, Phase IV, p. 485 and Annex E, pp. 2 and 3.

¹⁵ Letter, Major Milton V. O'Connell to Commandant, Marine Corps, 8 February 1949. It seems clear that Maxwell was directed to land, make his way eastward to the mouth of the Matanikau, reembark his battalion there, and be back in his defensive position on the perimeter by nightfall. Interview, Captain E. J. Snell (at that time assistant regimental adjutant, 5th Marines), 19 May 1949. Snell was present at the conversation between Hunt and Maxwell.

The battalion landed without incident at a spot recently vacated by a force of enemy, a fact made evident by the presence of hot food. The landing was completed by 0730, and movement to the east was begun at once.

The nature of the terrain, and the complete uncertainty regarding enemy strength and location, dictated the tactics which, in fact, made it impossible for the battalion commander to carry out the mission he understood had been given him. The narrow beach, bordered by thick scrub, shelved off into a narrow band of flat coastal land. This level stretch, from 200 to 300 yards wide, thickly overgrown, was threaded by a narrow road, the western extension of the coastal road that ran through the perimeter. On the inland side, the flat land terminated in a line of low coral cliffs, which in turn were the seaward faces of a jumbled ridge system that paralleled the beach. The ridges were cut at frequent intervals by deep, jungle-choked ravines which opened to the flat land. Passage along the ridges, therefore, would entail a series of cross-corridor movements, made the more difficult by the necessity of cutting through dense jungle in each corridor and by the additional fact that on the ridges themselves there was a combination of tough, five foot high kunae grass and murderously hot sun.¹⁶

Security dictated that a force move along the ridges to prevent a flanking attack, should it happen that enemy forces were in position there. Company C was given the mission and moved off to get into position. Company B moved off at the head of the column along the trail, followed by Headquarters Company and part of Company D. Company A furnished rear guard security.

Within an hour it became apparent that Company C could not keep pace with the main body. An additional bad feature was that, in the absence of "walkie-talkie" (TBY) radios, all contact between the two groups had to be by physical contact. By 0900 contact had been lost, and the battalion

¹⁶ Five months later, elements of the 2d Division fighting westward along the same ridges, encountered precisely the same problem.

halted. Company C was ordered to come down off the high ground and take place in the column behind Company B. The 1st Platoon, Company B, reinforced by one machine gun platoon from Company D was ordered at the same time to move up onto the ridge to its right and continue with the mission previously held by Company C.

Forward movement was resumed at about 1030. Within a half hour, at a point where the coral formation of the ridges squeezed the coastal strip into a narrow corridor less than 200 yards wide and where the thickly growing jungle scrub thinned out into a coconut grove, a deep ravine opened to the flat land. The Japanese, well dug in and taking advantage of the restricted avenue of approach and the splendid defensive possibilities offered by the coral, opened fire upon the advancing elements of Company B. This fire, initially from machine guns emplaced at the base of the cliffs and in the scrub at the edge of the beach, was immediately augmented by mortar fire, and Company B, deploying to each side of the trail, began to suffer casualties.

A firing line was built up, and mortars from Company D, going into position along the beach, began laying down fire upon the base of the cliffs. Company C, now in position behind Company B, was ordered to attempt a flanking movement around the left (seaward) flank. It was expected that the Company B platoon operating along the ridge would envelope the enemy's left flank.

The Company C maneuver failed, the company finding it impossible to progress beyond the line still held by Company B. The expected movement on the part of the right flank elements did not materialize for two reasons.

First, the problem of contact and communication had not been solved. Second, the combination of fantastically difficult terrain, jungle, grass, and sun, had begun to inflict damage upon the platoon that was more serious than that inflicted by the enemy. Messengers sent by the platoon appear to have been overcome by heat on the way in and taken to the battalion aid station. The leader

of the machine gun platoon was overcome and carried to the same place. The only message received by the platoon, on the other hand, was to "stand fast."¹⁷ It was the more easily obeyed because the platoon leader had no assurance that the mortar fire from Company D, falling along the base of the ridge below him, would be lifted when he began to advance.

In the meanwhile, Maxwell realized that he could not carry out his instructions to the letter. The enemy emplacements holding up his progress sheltered a force of unknown size, but of sufficient strength to deny him passage along the coastal strip. The terrain further inland had proved itself to be an enemy almost as effective in restricting his movement as the Japanese themselves. Convinced that the most important phase of his mission was that of returning prior to dusk to resume his defensive position on the perimeter, he requested that boats be sent to a point near Kokumbona so that he could withdraw. In anticipation of their arrival, he began moving a portion of the battalion to the expected point of embarkation.¹⁸

Two hours passed before the expected answer came. In the interval between the messages, part of Company B was withdrawn to the beach and, with the wounded, was embarked and sent on its way to Kukum. The boats had already left the beach when Hunt's answer to Maxwell's message came. Maxwell was told that he was relieved of command, which should pass to his next senior (O'Connell), that the battalion would remain in the field, and that the enemy force would continue to be attacked until defeated.¹⁹

O'Connell assumed command at once, and shortly afterward Colonel Hunt himself arrived at the beach and remained with the battalion as it went into position on the ridge for the night.

¹⁷ This came from the battalion sergeant major, in the temporary absence of the battalion commander. Interview, Major Thomas T. Grady (at that time in command of 1st Platoon, Company B), 19 May 1949.

¹⁸ The request was made by radio, at 1430 to the regimental commander. Letter, O'Connell to CMC, 8 February 1949.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

The attack, pressed home early next morning, met with no opposition. The entire enemy force had withdrawn during the night up the ravine which led back into the hills and around the mouth of which the Japanese had made their stand of the day before.²⁰ The battalion moved by the coastal road to Matanikau village, embarked, and returned to the perimeter.

THE TASIMBOKO RAID

The Tulagi area, after the first two days of the operation, had been relatively quiet. After the bitter fighting which attended the assault on and reduction of the island group, no contact had been made with enemy forces, save in patrol actions. Occasional visits by enemy destroyers and submarines occurred however, and when American ships began using the excellent harbor, enemy aircraft dropped bombs in the area sporadically, generally while en route to the more lucrative target of Henderson Field.²¹

Little damage was suffered by the Marines in any of these raids, the largest single loss being that of a YP boat, set on fire when the area was bombarded by three enemy destroyers shortly after midnight on 8 September.²²

The defenses of the island, initially oriented against an expected attack from Florida Island, were strengthened by the arrival of the 5-inch Navy type guns of the 3d Defense Battalion. One battery of these guns,

²⁰ At least a part of the force had been observed while withdrawing just after dusk on 27 August by members of the battalion. Interviews, Captain E. J. Snell, 19 May 1949 and Lieutenant Colonel G. D. Gayle, 19 May 1949.

²¹ *Report*, 3d Battalion, 2d Marines, entries 19 and 20 August, and 8, 9, and 10 September.

²² General Rupertus had directed that no fire be directed at enemy ships by shore batteries of his command. He feared that his positions might be revealed. During the first shelling by submarine, fire was returned by Battery G, 10th Marines, which was displacing along the coastal road on the southwest extremity of the island when the enemy craft fired. Interview, Lieutenant Colonel Manly L. Curry, 28 January 1949.

using wooden advanced-base platforms, was brought ashore from the *Betelgeuse* on 1 September. It was necessary to float the platforms in, while the guns themselves were manhandled, by block and fall, up the face of the coral hill where they were emplaced on the southern tip of the island.²³

The importance of the area in the matter of ground force activity lay in the fact that from it were mounted some of the more important patrol actions of the campaign. Florida Island was combed for remnants of the defeated Tulagi garrison as well as for signs of newly arrived enemy forces. With the assistance of loyal natives, Marine patrols ran down and captured or wiped out numerous survivors of the 7 August assault. The most diligent search, however, failed to indicate that there had been any attempt at reinforcement.

By the end of August, a combination of lack of employment for the relatively large force on the island, and a growing need for more troops on Guadalcanal, had led to the transfer of a part of Rupertus' forces. On 21 August, Combat Team 2 (2d Battalion, 5th Marines) passed across the strait on board the destroyer transports of TransDiv 12, newly arrived with badly needed supplies of food. On 31 August, the Raider Battalion had likewise been moved across to the perimeter, and on the same day, orders were received by Rupertus to move the Parachute Battalion across.²⁴

The Raider Battalion, to which the Parachute Battalion had now been attached for operational purposes, went into bivouac initially west of the Lunga and immediately behind Kukum. On September 2, two companies of the Raiders patrolled Savo Island, with negative results. Plans to execute a landing near Tassafaronga²⁵ the next day were aban-

²³ Interview, Lieutenant Colonel Custis Burton, September 1948. The two guns were mounted one above the other, so that fire would not be masked.

²⁴ *Record of Events, 1st Division, Tulagi*, entries for August.

²⁵ During these moves by the Japanese to reinforce and build up their forces on the island, Commander, Task Force 62 wrote to Admiral Ghormley on 29 August as follows: "... No additional raiding groups

done because of a curiously fortuitous error²⁶ and the two battalions moved into a gap on the south flank of the perimeter. Work was begun on the construction of defensive positions.

We have seen above that, while the presence of enemy forces to the east was realized, information regarding their size was sketchy and nothing was known of their composition. Clemens and his native scouts brought details that led to the conclusion that perhaps 300 enemy, well armed and occupying well constructed defensive positions, were in position immediately west of the village of Tasimboko. It was decided to wipe out this nucleus, and Edson was given the task.

Plans for the operation were more elaborate than those for the unfortunate Kokumbona affair which preceded it. The unit was to move in two echelons, using two APD's for the task. The Raider Battalion, in assault, would land immediately before dawn to the east of the village and strike out to the west. Gunfire support was to be given by the two destroyer transports, so timed that the assault force would benefit by the element of surprise. Air strikes likewise were planned, and Edson would be able to count on the support of the planes of MAG-23. An initial strike would be repeated, against designated targets, on request from Edson. The operation would be completed in one day, 8 September.

Immediately before the battalion embarked for the assault, disturbing news came in from native scouts who had been operat-

were available for mopping up outlying Japanese detachments, although the plan had required operations of this nature on both August 7th and 8th. Outlying detachments in the vicinity of *Cactus* (Guadalcanal) and *Ringbolt* (Tulagi) positions exist; it is planned to mop these up within the next few days using the First Raider Battalion."

²⁶ Two APD's — the *Little* and *Gregory* — were used in the movement. When they returned after dark to Lunga, Colonel Edson decided to keep the men embarked to facilitate the next day's operation. By the time word was got to the ships, however, a part of the men had already disembarked, and he decided to bring the whole group ashore. The two ships were sunk later the same night. Interview, Stiff, Sweeney, and Sperling, 4 February 1949.

ing in the vicinity of the target. Clemens, who translated their reports, gave it as his opinion that there had been a sudden increase in the size of the enemy garrison. Edson, according to Clemens, might well find himself assaulting positions occupied by several thousand well equipped men. Little credence was placed in the mathematical accomplishments of Clemens' followers, however, and it was decided to carry the planned action through, even though, there may have been a slight increase in enemy strength.²⁷

At 1800 on 7 September, the 1st Raider Battalion embarked at Kukum on the *Manley* and *McKean* and two small craft—YP boats, converted tuna fishing launches from the California coast. The 1st Parachute Battalion was moved down to Lunga Point to bivouac for the night, having been warned to stand by for movement at any time subsequent to 0600 on 8 September.

The movement was carried out according to plan and on schedule. The landing area was reached prior to 0500, and landing craft made the first of two trips to the beach during total darkness, at about 0520. They returned immediately for the remaining troops.²⁸

The ship-to-shore movement was conducted with every precaution to assure surprise. Landing craft traveled at reduced speed to cut down exhaust noise. Considerable worry was caused when there was an accidental discharge of a rifle as the boats of the first wave were approaching the beach, but as far as could be determined, the enemy was not alerted.²⁹

Movement began at daylight, with Company B on the beach, Company A in contact

²⁷ Interview, Colonel Edmund J. Buckley, July 1947. There had been a tenuous bit of confirmatory evidence. On the night of 5 September, another officer of the Raider Battalion had come to Buckley, saying that he thought ships must be passing to the eastward. He had noticed a series of regularly spaced waves coming ashore, that seemed to be those of a ship's wake.

²⁸ *Report of Operation, 1st Parachute Battalion*. Letter, Lieutenant Colonel William R. Williams to Commandant Marine Corps, 17 January 1949.

²⁹ Letter, Williams to Commandant. Interview, Major John Erskine, 24 January 1949.

on the left, and Company C striking further inland, to attack from the south in an enveloping movement. At 0635, planes of MAG-23 left the airstrip to deliver their first strike against the enemy positions—2 SBD's, for bombing accompanied by four P-400's, whose mission was strafing.³⁰ They struck at the area west of the village as Edson was moving toward it. At about the same time, *Manley* and *McKean* began lobbing shells into the same target.

Concurrently with the air strike and the naval gunfire, two United States ships—*Fuller* and *Bellatrix*—under destroyer escort, came into sight from the southeast, on their way to Lunga. This event had a significance that became apparent only later, as will be discussed below.

By 0855 Edson reported to the perimeter that he had made contact, and that two pieces of enemy artillery had been overrun.³¹ The contact had been light and there was still no information as to the strength of the enemy, who appeared to have withdrawn toward the village.³² Edson requested that bombers be kept in the air, and, in answer to this request, General Vandegrift advised him that ten planes would be in continuous support, with another squadron on call.³³

At 1045 the Raiders reported still further progress, but included in the message was a request for advice on the possibility of landing more troops to the west of Tasimboko. Division replied that such a move was not feasible and suggested that the Raiders re-embark and return to the perimeter. Forty-five minutes later a message from Edson announced that more artillery pieces had been taken and that the battalion was advancing slowly against heavy opposition. The enemy was now estimated to number about 1000 well armed and well equipped troops. Pressure upon the attackers was increasing; the enemy was using field artillery at point-blank range.³⁴

³⁰ WD, MAG-23, 8 September 1942.

³¹ *D-3 Journal*, 8 September. Message 1.

³² *Ibid.*, Message 5.

³³ *Ibid.*, Message 6.

³⁴ *D-3 Journal*, 8 September. Messages 7, 8, 9, and 10.

About this time, contact was reestablished between the various companies of the battalion, after having been lost for an hour or more, and, at about the same time, the 1st Parachute Battalion, which had embarked and left Kukum at 0818, reported to the Raiders' headquarters³⁵ together with Company E, 1st Raider Battalion. In view of this, Colonel Edson decided to go through with the attack, requesting additional air support.³⁶ This was given him in the form of a strafing attack on enemy positions by four P-400's.³⁷ An enveloping movement was developed from the south, with the 1st Parachute Battalion providing flank and rear guard security for the Raiders' main body.

When the attack was finally pressed home and the village was entered, it was found that once again, the main body of the enemy had escaped destruction.³⁸

Here also it was discovered that the reports turned in by the native scouts and discounted by the division staff had been far more accurate than had been believed. On the basis of amounts of food, equipment, ammunition, and other material, it was estimated that no less than 4000 Japanese had been in the vicinity until shortly before the attack.³⁹

Documentary material was taken for intelligence purposes. Among the captured arms were found several 47mm antitank guns of a type that "plagued us later on," to quote the words of Colonel Griffith in his letter quoted herewith in a footnote. Fuses were removed from shells and cast into the sea, and the same treatment was given breech mechanisms. Other material was either burned or rendered useless, as in the case of food, by unorthodox but effective means.

There was much speculation as to the rea-

³⁵ 1st Parachute Battalion, *Tasimboko Raid*.

³⁶ *D-3 Journal*, 8 September. Messages 14 and 15.

³⁷ WD, MAG-23, 8 September.

³⁸ *D-3 Journal*, 8 September. Message 19.

³⁹ In a letter to the Officer-in-Charge, Historical Section, 15 February 1949, Colonel Samuel B. Griffith points out that the main force had left the area when the Raiders struck. Only supply dump guards were left, to the number of several hundred. Griffith led the enveloping force that struck from the south.

sons why a large force, of the kind that had obviously been present only shortly before Edson's landing, should have allowed itself to be driven off by a comparative handful of men. (The total strength of the attacking force did not exceed 850, and probably was considerably less.) It was suggested that the fortuitous appearance of the *Fuller* and *Bellatrix*, with their escort of destroyers, created the impression that a large landing was under way. The coincidence of gunfire support and the air strike with their appearance may well have the Japanese to come to such a conclusion, although it is now known that the main body of the Kawaguchi Brigade had left the area on the first stages of its movement toward the perimeter.⁴⁰

Save that the enemy force was not destroyed, the action was an unqualified success. The cost in casualties was extremely low—two killed and six wounded—while the enemy had lost at least 27 dead. The entire base was reduced to rubble, and neither food nor equipment remained in a usable condition. Those forces which later were observed making their way inland were presumably in a precarious situation in the matter of supplies. With this aspect of the matter in mind, it is possible to say that the Tasimboko raid had a profound effect upon the Battle of the Ridge, where Edson finally met in battle the enemy general whom he missed at Tasimboko.

GATHERING STRENGTH

While the above mentioned patrol actions were being fought to the east and the west, and while the Marines were learning the strength and location and tactical peculiarities of the enemy, other activities important to the operation were being expedited. The flow of supplies, interrupted almost as soon as it began when Fletcher found it advisable to withdraw, was renewed as Turner pushed his ships into the area at every opportunity. The remaining regiment of Vandegrift's divi-

⁴⁰ Letter, Griffith to OinC, Historical Section, 15 February 1949.

sion—the 7th Marines (reinforced)—was on its way from Samoa. Malaria, which was to be a scourge from October onward, had not yet made its appearance in significant strength.

The most welcome accretion of strength, as we have seen, was that afforded by the coming of the various squadrons of MAG-23. The improvement of the situation had been almost instantaneous, and the reinforcements for the initial group, arriving late in August, had resulted in a growing feeling of confidence on the part of the air as well as the ground personnel.

September 3 saw the arrival of the command echelon of the 1st Marine Air Wing, when Brigadier General Roy S. Geiger, accompanied by Chief of Staff, Colonel Louis E. Woods, and his intelligence officer, Lieutenant Colonel John C. Munn, arrived at Henderson Field by transport plane.⁴¹



MAJGEN ROY S. GEIGER, veteran Marine aviation commander, established 1st Marine Air Wing Headquarters on Guadalcanal on 3 September. His mixed, all-Service command soon became known as "Cactus Air Force", because of the code-name for the island.

Geiger immediately reported to Vandegrift for duty and set up his headquarters, using the staff of MAG-23 as Wing staff. The command post was established close to division, and liaison in the form of daily conferences between Vandegrift and Geiger became normal procedure. Colonel Kenneth H. Weir, Marine Corps aviator, operated at Vandegrift's command post as permanent contact man, and liaison at the level of MAG-23 was constant, with Colonel Gerald Thomas and Lieutenant Colonel Merrill B. Twining keeping in touch continually with the air arm of the team.⁴²

Improvisation was necessary in almost all administrative as well as in technical matters. To keep up with the matter of personnel and other administrative records, the Wing functioned with a staff consisting of one sergeant and an enlisted clerk. Lieutenant Robb, Naval Aviation, held a permanent berth at Wing Headquarters where his duties consisted in keeping track of the Naval aviators who came more and more often to the field from carriers in the vicinity.

Lack of adequate equipment for fueling and arming planes likewise made it necessary for the aviators to employ makeshift methods, sometimes of rather primitive character. Bombs, even as late as the Battle of Guadalcanal in November, had to be slung in by man power. Radio communication with planes on patrol gave rise to another prob-

⁴¹ Geiger, during the course of the war, acquired something of a monolithic stature. Aside from the personal qualities which made his staffs function almost automatically, he never forgot that there was a ground war being fought. His visits to the front lines—never very far from his Command Post on the most exposed hill in the badly battered perimeter—have become legendary. His study of ground problems was intense and perhaps teleologic—he became the first Marine officer to command an army. Upon the death of General Simon Bolivar Buckner on Okinawa, Geiger succeeded to command of the Tenth Army and held it until replaced by General Stilwell.

⁴² Conference, Major General William J. Wallace and Brigadier General William O. Brice, 4 January 1949. Weir was the first Marine Corps aviator to land on Guadalcanal. He came ashore with Vandegrift on 7 August.

lem—the channels used by Army planes differed from those used by Navy, and the Army planes could not receive Navy traffic. This matter was resolved by using the radio from a grounded P-400—twin microphones were rigged so that messages could be sent simultaneously to all planes.⁴³

THE BATTLE OF THE RIDGE

Immediately after the raid on Tasimboko, signs began to appear that the movement by the enemy from that base was something other than the precipitate flight it had been thought to be.

Patrols from the 2d Battalion, 1st Marines, operating in the area lying east and southeast of the perimeter encountered opposition with increasing frequency. Mountain guns, singly and in batteries, were found at various points within range of the perimeter. These weapons, always in perfect condition and carefully smeared with cosmoline, frequently were found unguarded. On several occasions a single enemy soldier was found, evidently merely a caretaker left to service the weapon and the ammunition that invariably was found buried nearby.⁴⁴

From native scouts also came news of the movement of large bodies of troops, groups that were in no way similar to the small bands of disorganized, ill-equipped survivors of the ill-fated Ichiki detachment. There was an air of purpose and direction about them that was apparent even to the local natives who had deserted their villages and fled toward the perimeter.

By 10 September it was known that the enemy was less than five miles east of the perimeter and that he was cutting a road to the south.⁴⁵ Here again it was from friendly natives that the most authentic and dependable intelligence data came, for the enemy movement was by this time taking place un-

der the cover of rain forest trees, safely hidden from aerial observation.

These considerations pointed to the strong possibility that an attack would be made upon the perimeter from the south or the southeast. The fact that supplies of all kinds were landed indicated that the enemy force, subsequently identified as the Kawaguchi Brigade, intended operating from the eastward. The additional fact that much of its supplies had been destroyed by the Raiders made it extremely likely that there would be little delay in the launching of the attack, for even the numerous native gardens in the region were not sufficient to enable a force of that size to live off the country.

The situation brought up again, and imperatively, the problem of defending the inland sector of the perimeter.

The alternative to a complete and continuous defensive line was to establish a series of strong positions wherever the terrain permitted. Some of these positions were manned by personnel of the rifle regiments and battalions; others were manned by special troops of one or another unit. The 1st Amphibian Tractor Battalion, for example, was given the responsibility of maintaining a defensive position located on a ridge which commanded the approach from the west, on the inland extension of the left flank. The Engineer Battalion tied in with the right flank of 1st Marines positions, and extended that flank to the left elements of the Parachute Battalion. The Pioneers went into position on a small hill immediately east of the Lunga River, to the southeast of the Amphibian Tractor Battalion detachment.

On 9 September, General Vandegrift's command post, previously situated against a small ridge on the northwest of the main airstrip, was moved to the inland (south) side of a small hill just inside the jungle south of the field. This was done because the former location was well within the target area of the enemy air strikes, which, after the first day, had been directed solely against the air-

⁴³ Conference, General Wallace and General Brice, 4 January 1949.




⁴⁴ Interview, Colonel William W. Stickney, March 1949.

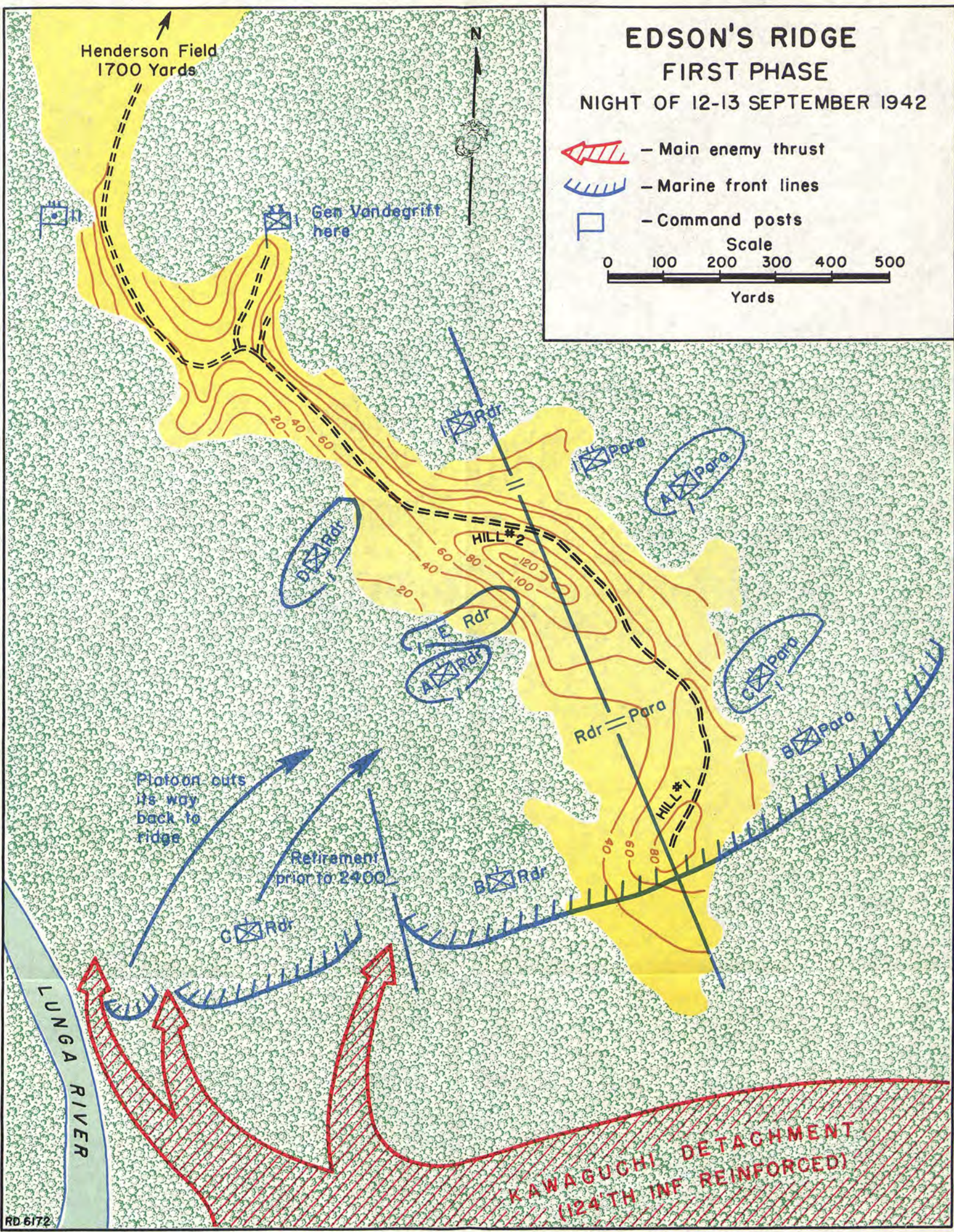
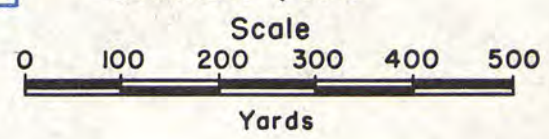
⁴⁵ *The Island*, p. 92.

⁴⁶ *Final Report*, Phase IV, pp. 5 and 6. See also Annex J.

EDSON'S RIDGE FIRST PHASE

NIGHT OF 12-13 SEPTEMBER 1942

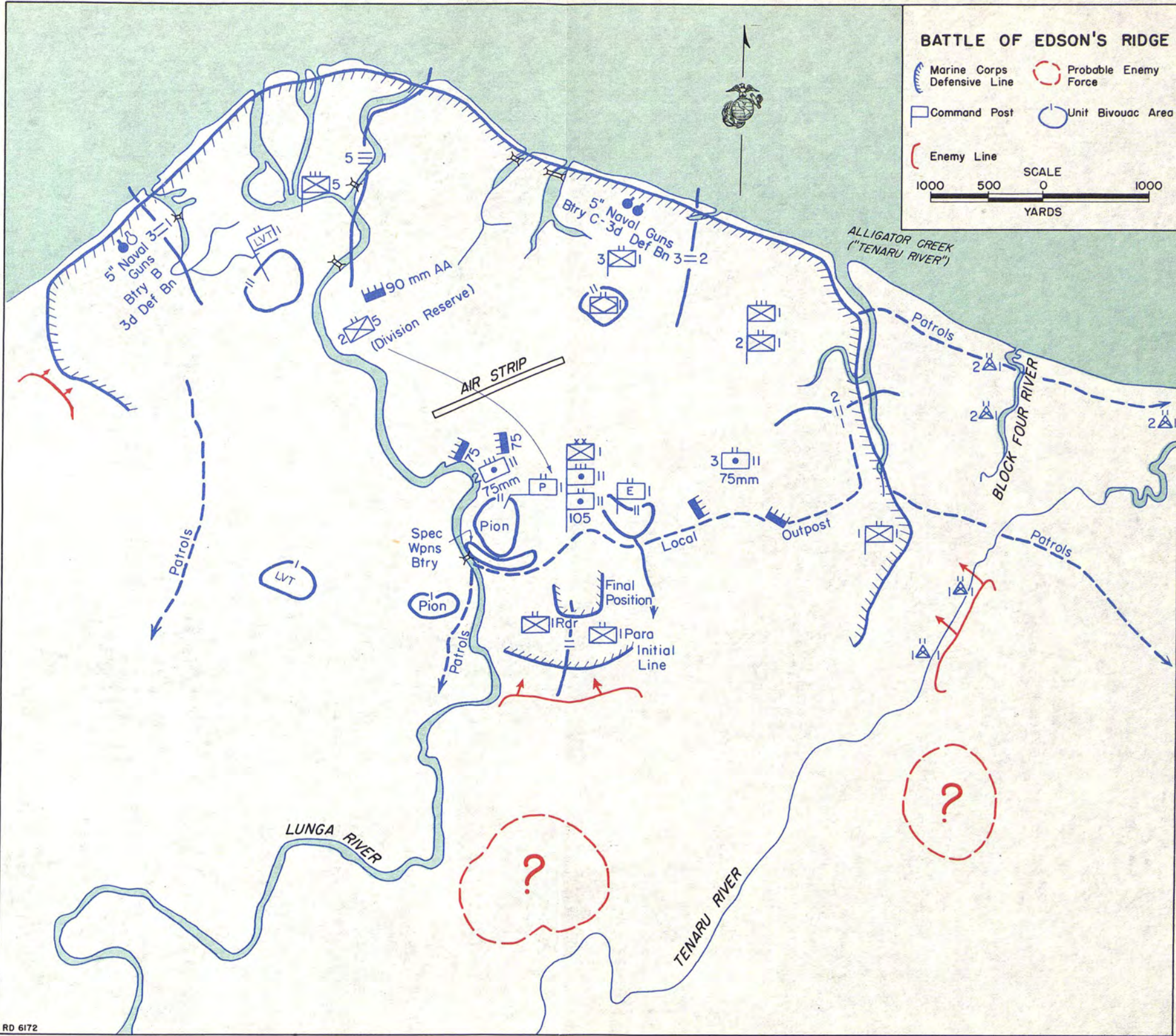
-  - Main enemy thrust
-  - Marine front lines
-  - Command posts



BATTLE OF EDSON'S RIDGE

Legend:

- Marine Corps Defensive Line (Blue line with hachures)
- Command Post (Square with 'P')
- Enemy Line (Red line with hachures)
- Probable Enemy Force (Red dashed circle with '?')
- Unit Bivouac Area (Blue circle)
- SCALE: 1000 500 0 1000 YARDS



field.⁴⁷ On the same day the Raider Battalion, still with the Parachute Battalion attached, returned to the positions they had occupied prior to their foray against Tasimoko—astride a ridge immediately inland from the airstrip.

Just south of the airfield, the land begins to fold into the jumbled terrain of the foothills, and the open country ends in jungle-covered flats and ravines. Now and then a small area of kunae grass appears, generally on top a low hill or ridge.

One such ridge, perhaps a thousand yards long and with its length running northwest and southeast, rose out of the jungle a short mile from the runway. It dominated the field, with which it was connected by a narrow road. The ground surrounding the ridge was lower, falling away toward the streambed of the Lunga, lying to the west and the southwest, and toward that of the Tenaru, toward the east. In each case the land was covered with unbroken jungle.

Deep ravines, heavily and in some cases impenetrably wooded, bordered the hill on all sides. Four short but distinct spurs jutted from it, two on each side, slanting away from the ridge line, and between the knob at the southern extremity and the northernmost end of the ridge rose two other hillocks. Just west of the southern end of the ridge in a heavily overgrown flat, there was a deep impassable lagoon.

By 12 September, it became obvious that action was impending. A reconnaissance by Edson, his executive officer (Griffith), and two enlisted runners convinced the battalion commander that there was an enemy force of considerable size to his front. He decided to patrol the area next day with his entire battalion, to throw the enemy off balance, and then return to prepared positions.

During the afternoon, as if to give point to his realization, an air raid struck, and a stick of bombs was dropped along the long axis of the ridge—a clear indication that the enemy was aware of the presence of a strong defending force there.⁴⁸ Edson called for a conference of his company commanders, to

⁴⁷ *The Island*, p. 93.

be held during the evening, at which time plans for the next day's movements would be discussed.

The small size of the force, and the length and character of the sector which it was called upon to defend precluded the possibility of establishing a continuous line. To the left, tying in with the Engineers, were two understrength companies of the Parachute Battalion, whose position in turn extended to the midpoint of the southern slope of the ridge. On their right, Company B, Raider Battalion, held the sector extending toward the right, where it tied in with the left elements of Company C. All its line lay within the grassy area that covered the forward slope save the extreme right flank platoon, which was in position within the jungle. Double apron wire protected the front over the grassy land, while within the jungle

⁴⁸ Interview, Stiff, Sweeney, and Sperling, 4 February 1949. As the ridge lay perhaps a mile from the airstrip (against which all previous attacks had been launched) and since the axes of the ridge and the strip lay at almost right angles to each other, this bombing was not considered to be wholly fortuitous.



LUCKIER AT HOME THAN AT EDSON'S RIDGE, MajGen Kawaguchi and friends pose here in a moment of relaxation on an earlier and happier day.

there was single strand wire, looped from tree to tree. Fields of fire had been cut here.

Immediately to the right of Company B, a single platoon of Company C was in position on the edge of the lagoon. Beyond this impassable jungle barrier, the rest of Company C, also behind single strand wire and disposed as a series of small strong points with fields of fire cut for mutual support, extended to the right bank of the Lunga.

Companies A and D, in battalion reserve, were to the rear of B and C, on the western slope of the ridge. Company E, whose machine gun sections had been parceled out as supporting elements for the rifle companies, remained at the battalion command post, across the ridge to the east of the reserve.

At about 2100,⁴⁹ as the company commanders were leaving the command post at the conclusion of the conference, an enemy plane dropped a flare over the airfield. At 2130, an intense bombardment of the area was begun by four enemy ships lying off the mouth of the Lunga—a light cruiser and three destroyers.⁵⁰ The shells fell generally in the eastern sector of the perimeter rather than on Edson's positions, although a few of them found targets there. The bombardment lasted for 20 minutes. Just prior to 2130 a flare rose from the area forward of Company B's lines.

Kawaguchi, by this time, had moved northward from his hastily established bivouac area on the right bank of the upper Lunga (found later by the 1st Battalion, 1st Marines and by patrols from the 7th Marines) and had assembled his brigade for the assault.⁵¹

As the flare died away, he delivered the first of the headlong, powerful assaults that later were to force the Raiders out of position, back along the ridge, and come danger-

⁴⁹ *The Island*, p. 94.

⁵⁰ *Robinson ms.*, p. 4.

⁵¹ The brigade consisted of the remainder of the Ichiki unit (850 men), a part of the 124th Infantry, reinforced by many small detachments of special weapons, engineers, artillery, and communicators (2050 men), and the 2d Battalion, 4th Infantry (550 men). *USAFISPA Report*, p. 8.

ously close to splitting the perimeter defense wide open. Preceded by yelling and scattered rifle fire forward of the juncture of Companies B and C, two strong thrusts were delivered down the east bank of the lagoon. The left flank platoon of Company C was sliced off from its parent company and driven back. The right flank platoon of Company B drove out into the open, and curling back to its right rear, maintained contact on the left with the rest of the company. The result was a partially refused right flank for the company. A third blow, delivered some minutes later, further cut down the strength of Company C by cutting off a second left flank platoon. A small enemy party worked its way down the river and attempted to envelop the dismembered company.⁵² These attacks were accompanied by a second naval bombardment, which lasted from about 2400 to 0045, falling this time on the airstrip and on the eastern sector lines.

During the rest of the night, Company B was ignored by the enemy and held fast to its exposed position on the southern slope, while Edson attempted to restore his lines. After daylight, companies A and D, as yet unengaged, were sent up the right bank of the Lunga in an attempt to eliminate the enemy salient. The attempt was unsuccessful—the Japanese had dug in and had a strong force in the jungle flats. Also, while Company A was only slightly understrength, Company D had almost ceased to exist save as a skeleton organization, since its men had been used as replacements for the other rifle companies of the battalion.⁵³

Ground activity during the daylight hours of 13 September, consisted, as we have seen, of attempts on the part of the Marines to re-establish their positions and on the part of the Japanese to consolidate and organize the ground they had gained. It became evident after the failure of the Raiders to eliminate the salient west of the ridge, that Company



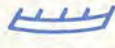


⁵² *The Island*, p. 95.

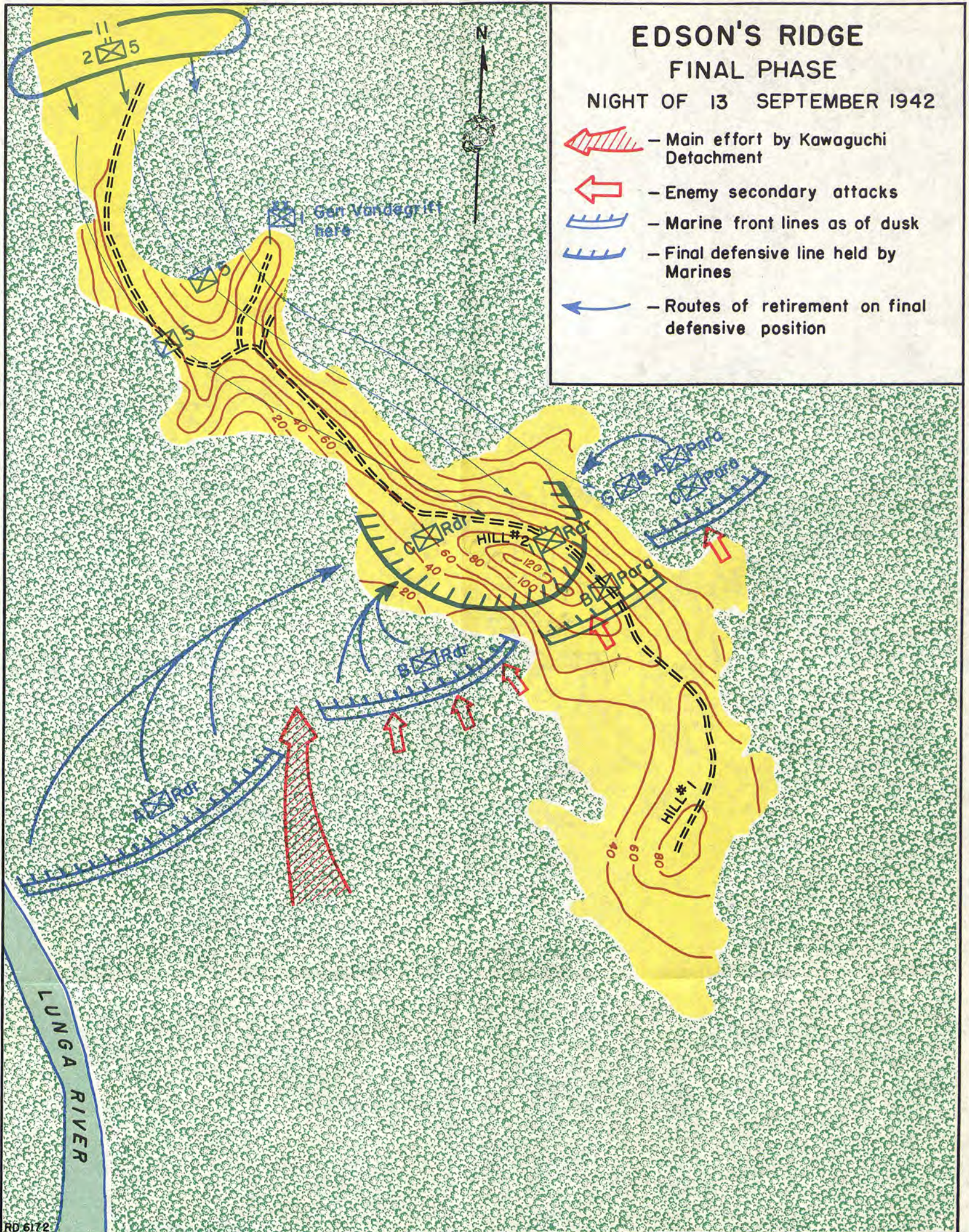
⁵³ Interview, Stiff, Sweeney, Sperling, 4 February 1949. Sperling estimates that his company—D—consisted of only 30 men at the time it went forward to wipe out the enemy pocket.

EDSON'S RIDGE

FINAL PHASE

NIGHT OF 13 SEPTEMBER 1942

-  - Main effort by Kawaguchi Detachment
-  - Enemy secondary attacks
-  - Marine front lines as of dusk
-  - Final defensive line held by Marines
-  - Routes of retirement on final defensive position



B's position was untenable in the face of further attacks. Sweeney, commanding the company, therefore withdrew his men one-third of the way back the ridge and disposed them along a spur that jutted off to the west—rugged terrain that imposed upon him the necessity of using small groups as strong points rather than in continuous line. Reinforcements were given him in the shape of Company B, 1st Engineer Battalion.

In the meantime, air activity had kept pace with the ground action. On 11 September, the day before Edson first established contact with Kawaguchi's force, the 1st Marine Air Wing had received a welcome, if temporary, accretion in strength. Late in the afternoon, 24 F4F-4's of VF-5, based on *Saratoga*, were led into Henderson Field by Lieutenant Commander Leroy C. Simpler. Word had come to ComSoPac of an ominous gathering of enemy naval and ground strength to the northwest, and Ghormley was beginning to look upon the situation on the island with something akin to alarm.⁵⁴

On 12 September, the perimeter was at-

⁵⁴ *History of Marine Corps Aviation in World War II*. On the same day, Ghormley recommended that the 7th Marines, en route to service under General MacArthur in accordance with King's 7 September directive to CinCPac to send the General an amphibious trained regiment, be sent instead to Vandegrift. *Ghormley ms*, p. 120.



WHERE THE TIDE TURNED—Edson's final position on the Ridge, as viewed from Bailey's intermediate position just southward. If *this last* line had been carried by the enemy, Guadalcanal would probably have been lost.

tacked by 42 enemy planes. Twenty-one of Simpler's fighters joined with 11 Marine planes to fight off the attack, which they did, exacting a toll of 16 planes from the Japanese at a cost of one plane and pilot, lost in a landing mishap.⁵⁵

Of the four attacks which the enemy air force launched against perimeter on 13 September, only one was pressed home. Two were turned back at 0510 and 1320, one got as far as the perimeter at 1020 before being beaten back, and just at dusk two float planes, in an audacious low altitude strike, shot down an SBD and escaped to seaward.

During the afternoon of 13 September, the commanding officer⁵⁶ of 2d Battalion, 5th Marines, realizing that his unit (the division reserve) would be called upon to bolster the battered Raider Battalion, conducted a reconnaissance of the area with his company commanders—a wise precaution, for the battalion, as we shall see, was committed piecemeal in total darkness in the midst of Kawaguchi's strongest effort.

The anticipated attack struck at 1830, with a strong movement against the center of Edson's positions, supported by another blow against the right front. Once more the enemy succeeded in opening a gap between Company B and the unit to the right—Company A. Company B's right flank platoon was struck squarely and driven out of position. It fought its way out of trouble and fell back upon Company C, now in battalion reserve.

Kawaguchi's main effort, which came close to succeeding, was directed at the right center of Edson's position. Giving only passing attention to the Raider-Parachute Battalion left flank, which was occupied by an inadequate force of parachutists,⁵⁷ and neglecting

⁵⁵ *History of Marine Corps Aviation in World War II*.

⁵⁶ Colonel William J. Whaling had taken the battalion temporarily when Rosecrans was injured during an air raid two days before.

⁵⁷ The sector held by the Parachute Battalion companies so far had not been threatened. It seems clear, however, that during the night of 12-13 September, about half the troops in position there withdrew. Letter, Colonel Samuel B. Griffith to Officer-in-Charge, Historical Section, 15 February 1949.

to follow through on the extreme right flank, the enemy elected to attack along the route which, from point of view of terrain, offered the easiest access to the air field.

After a preliminary blow at 1830 against the juncture of Companies B and A, which drove the right flank platoon of the former back and opened a gap of more than 200 yards between the two units, the Japanese chose to direct their strongest effort at the by now tenuous lines of Company B. At 2130 there was an attack down the ridge itself, which may have been precipitated by the sudden use of a defensive element that up until then had not made its appearance—artillery of the 11th Marines.⁵⁸

One battery of these weapons, sited for defense of the southern sector, had registered on the area directly in front of Company B earlier in the evening. At 2100, notified by the forward observer, who had established a listening post in Company B's lines, with telephone lines through the Raider Battalion switchboard to that of the 5th Battalion, 11th Marines, that there appeared to be a strong group of enemy in the woods forward of his position, the artillery battalion commander laid down fire in the indicated target area. The range was decreased, with Edson's consent, to such a degree that the next concentration, fired at 2130, fell within 200 yards of Company B's lines.⁵⁹

The remaining batteries of the battalion were brought into position to fire into the area, and by 2200 another heavy concentration was laid down immediately in front of the Raiders' positions. Once more there was

⁵⁸The 5th Battalion, 11th Marines, had brought its 105mm howitzers to the island in spite of a prevalent feeling that the jungle terrain would prohibit the use of prime movers. This feeling was responsible for the fact that the 4th Battalion of the same regiment was left behind in New Zealand—its larger and heavier 155mm weapons required specialized equipment for displacing. The 105's, in a pinch, could be moved by the ubiquitous amphibian tractor or the almost unbelievably versatile jeep.

⁵⁹*Final Report*, Phase IV, Annex E, p. 2. "This seemed to create some confusion among the enemy, and a few were seen to come out of the edge of the woods toward the ridge our troops were holding."

a rush of enemy out of the stricken zone and toward the ridge.

One half hour later, the Parachute Battalion positions were attacked for the first time. An intense fire from mortars, together with confusing shouts and the use of smoke, drove the two companies back to the base of the ridge and then along it to the northward.

Company B was now in a hopeless position. Its right flank, deprived of one platoon and refused, was disposed in a series of small strong points along the western slope of the ridge at the midpoint. The left flank, however, was dangling, and to the left rear, in place of a reserve such as was present to the right rear, there were only the Parachute Companies, disorganized by their retreat.

Edson moved his command post to the top of a high knob that dominates the northern half of the ridge, disposed Company C, the battalion reserve, as a defensive nucleus around the western and southern slopes of the knob, and directed Sweeney to bring his company back and form around it.⁶⁰ Sweeney's force by this time numbered about 60 men.

The withdrawal was assisted—perhaps even made possible—by the fact that artillery, firing at minimum range and below, placed standing barrages at all points forward of the company where it seemed possible for the enemy to advance. Then, when the company had completed the movement (in the pitch black of a clear, moonless night)⁶¹ the artillery concentration was pulled in still further, and the barrage stood like a wall before the Raiders' positions for the rest of the night. Those enemy who penetrated it were brought under intense fire from rifles and automatic weapons at short

⁶⁰*Final Report*, Phase IV, p. 10. Edson's directions to Sweeney were delivered *viva voce*—a corporal at the command post yelled, "Red Mike says it's O.K. to withdraw." Interview, Stiff, Sweeney, and Sperling, 4 February 1949.

⁶¹Interview, Stiff, Sweeney, and Sperling, 4Feb49. Stiff, at Edson's command post, carried a half case of grenades down the slope to replenish Company C's supply. He walked completely through and forward of the position without realizing it, so dark was the night and so attenuated the company's lines.

range, and those who survived the two ordeals were taken on, hand to hand, by the individual Marines. The myth of the Japanese superman died that night as Kawaguchi's force was cut to pieces.

By 0400, while the attack was still going on, companies of the reserve battalion—2d Battalion, 5th Marines—began to be committed to bolster up the disorganized left flank. The companies were committed singly, making their way first to a predesignated assembly area between the northern extremity of the ridge and the western end of the airstrip. Company G, arriving first, went into position on the eastern slope of the hill, coming under intense machine gun fire as it moved in and receiving casualties. The other companies, following at intervals, were not aware of the fact that a part of the Raiders line had been withdrawn since their reconnaissance of the previous day, made their way up to, and in some case through the lines. Filling the gaps in the Raider Battalion's positions, they helped in standing off the final efforts of Kawaguchi's infantry.⁶²

By daybreak, the attacks had died away, and aside from desultory rifle fire, there was little sign of life in the woods south of the ridge. A few enemy, isolated when their companions withdrew or were wiped out, remained in position on the ridge and in the draws beside it. They were hunted out and killed.

The *coup de grace*, if one were needed, was given by the P-400's of the 67th Squadron. Leaving the field just after daybreak, they strafed the woods whence the attacks of the previous nights had come, and, according to the remarks of an enemy officer as quoted by Robert Sherrod in his account of the aviation activities of the Marines,⁶³ they were the final and conclusive catastrophe for the enemy brigade: "Intensive bombing and strafing followed our unsuccessful attack at dawn, and our efforts to take the field are doomed to failure."

While the Battle of the Ridge was in prog-

⁶² Letter, Whaling to CMC.

⁶³ *History of Marine Corps Aviation in World War II*.

ress, and while the perimeter was being subjected to gunfire from enemy surface craft, the newly emplaced 5-inch guns of the 3d Defense Battalion went into action for the first time. Battery C had been in position and ready for action since 1800, 10 September, a short distance east of the mouths of the Lunga River. One gun of Battery B, near Kukum, had been made ready by late afternoon of the 13th. On the same night, four enemy destroyers stood in to within 7000 yards, on a magnetic azimuth of 345 degrees. They were engaged by both batteries. Four rounds were expended by Battery B before the enemy withdrew from its range.⁶⁴ Battery C continued until it had fired 29 rounds, securing at least one hit. The enemy craft then pulled out to 18,000 yards.⁶⁵

During the night of 13-14 September, another sector of the perimeter was subjected to attack, perhaps launched in support of that against the ridge, although there was little evidence of coordination between the two attacking forces. The 3d Battalion, 1st Marines, in position far to the left of the Raiders' area of activity, held the innermost extension of what was known as the right, or east, flank of the perimeter. Alligator Creek, upon which this flank position was based nearer the beach, extends only a relatively short distance inland, and in the sector occupied by the 3d Battalion there was no such natural line of defense. The battalion was emplaced at the edge of a jungle, with prepared fields of fire to its front, where a wide plain had been cleared of grass by burning. The position was continuous and strongly protected by wire.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ *Final Report*, Phase IV, pp. 11 and 12.

⁶⁵ Here, as at Tulagi, the lack of cranes and tractors had made it necessary to manhandle the weapons into position. Another problem beset the personnel of the battalion in the form of a high water-table. It was not possible to sink the emplacements to the proper depth because of seepage. It was therefore necessary to build them up to trunion height. LtCol Curtis Burton in interview with the author.

⁶⁶ Listening posts were forward of wire. One of these was overrun; and a wounded Marine of K Company, 1st Marines, was found alive on 18 September by a patrol from Company G, 1st Marines. *Patrol Report*, G-2-1, 2d Lt George M. Stratton.



WIRE PROTECTED THE 1st MARINES' POSITIONS fronting on the grassy plain, across which the Japanese 1st Battalion, 124th Infantry delivered an attack during the Edson's Ridge battle to the west.

The Japanese 1st Battalion, 124th Infantry, attacked at midnight across the plain, against the extreme right flank, and, after being thrown back, continued the engagement as a fire fight from the jungle beyond the cleared plain. By morning it was estimated that about one Japanese battalion, plus an undetermined amount of artillery, was in position there, and it was decided to employ light tanks, 1st Tank Battalion, to clean them out. This was begun with some success, but the mistake was made of allowing repeated sorties over the same route. This, once the enemy had emplaced his 47mm antitank weapons, resulted in the loss of three vehicles.⁶⁷

The fight thereupon degenerated into a fire-fight of steadily lessening intensity, which died away completely on the 16th. The enemy losses were estimated at 200 in this area.

A third attack, by no means as intense as the two just described, was repulsed on the sector held by the 3d Battalion, 5th Marines, in position on the west flank, on a ridge which commanded the approaches from the Matanikau. At the inception of this attack, some worry was felt because of a lack of

⁶⁷ *Final Report*, Phase IV, p. 12.

reserves at the threatened point, but prompt employment of artillery succeeded in driving the enemy back.⁶⁸

In the Battle of Edson's Ridge, the Marines suffered casualties of about 20% of the men engaged—31 killed, 103 wounded, and nine missing—while on the ridge alone and the territory immediately adjacent to it, more than 600 enemy dead were found. Many more were killed in subsequent operations along the Lunga River, and an undeterminable number died of wounds en route to the area beyond the Matanikau. This does not include the 200-odd who were killed in the attack on the position of 3d Battalion, 1st Marines, nor the unmentioned and apparently undetermined number who fell before the 3d Battalion, 5th Marines.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ *Final Report*, Phase IV, p. 12. See also *The Island*, p. 104.

⁶⁹ *Final Report*, Phase IV, p. 11.



COL MERRITT A. EDSON, whose defense of the Ridge saved Henderson Field, was subsequently awarded the Medal of Honor for his heroism and skill.

Enemy sources—in the form of documents and information from prisoners—say that about 1500 casualties were suffered.⁷⁰ The balance of the ill-fated Ichiki Unit was wiped out, the 1st Battalion, 124th Infantry, and the 2d Battalion, 4th Infantry, were badly hit.

Artillery support throughout all three phases of the attacks had been provided and controlled by forward observers and liaison personnel. A forward observation post was maintained on the ridge, and fire from the 105mm howitzers was adjusted from that post. Wire communication was successful between the OP and the fire-direction center, being interrupted only when the OP was displacing rearward from its farthest forward position.⁷¹

A total of 1,992 rounds of 105mm ammunition was fired in defense of the ridge at ranges of from 1600 to 2000 yards, sometimes within 200 yards of the front lines. In defense of the other positions, the 75mm pack howitzer was used, and a total of 878 rounds was expended by the 2d and 3d Battalions, 11th Marines. Existing maps, which had not been corrected or revised since before the initial landings, were found to be extremely inadequate, since clouds had obscured the area of the operation on the original serial photo and there was no accurate knowledge of the terrain. As a result, all concentrations, as well as friendly front lines, had to be "shot in".

Edson's force was replaced on the Ridge by the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines, and went into bivouac near Kukum. The 1st Parachute Battalion left the island shortly after the conclusion of the battle, and landed at Noumea, New Caledonia, on 22 September, the first unit to be evacuated from the

⁷⁰ USAFISPA Report, p. 7.

⁷¹ Artillery information is taken from Annex E to *Final Report*, Phase IV. Details were clarified in conference with Major General P. A. del Valle. At the time of the events described, del Valle was Artillery Officer of the 1st Marine Division.



MAJ KENNETH D. BAILEY, wounded during the Battle of Edson's Ridge, subsequently killed in action on the Matanikau, was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor for his fight on the Ridge.

island.⁷² The Raider Battalion remained on the island.

Both Edson and the commanding officer of Company C, Major Kenneth D. Bailey, received the Medal of Honor for their part in turning back most serious single assault of the campaign. Edson's award was given as a result of his outstanding coolness and skill under fire—a quality which permitted him to handle his forces in an intricate night maneuver while engaged in a desperately fought action. Bailey, soon to lose his life on the upper Matanikau, was awarded the medal posthumously for his leadership—painfully wounded, he stayed in action in the most exposed positions, encouraging and directing the men under him.

⁷² *War Diary*, Commander, Task Force 62. Entry 22 September 1942.



THE GUADALCANAL
CAMPAIGN

Development of the Perimeter and Actions to the West

CHAPTER VI



PATROLLING INTENSIFIED as it became evident that this was the only effective method of divining Japanese intentions under Guadalcanal jungle cover. This Marine unit is crossing the Matanikau River footbridge.

IMMEDIATELY following the battle of the Ridge, active patrolling from the perimeter was resumed to the south, the east, and the southwest. It had been shown once again that it was possible for a determined enemy to bring large bodies of troops practically to the Marine perimeter without detection from

the air or from observation posts, and once again it was realized that the only safeguard against such movements was a program of patrolling designed to keep under constant inspection all feasible avenues of approach to the airfield.

These patrol activities ranged from short

reconnaissances carried out by small parties, to combat missions involving the use of a full battalion or more.¹ Indeed, all the offensive blows struck by the Division prior to its first tentative advances to the northwest in November may be classed as patrol actions, even those which involved movement by boat to points up or down the coast, since no one of them was undertaken with the idea of altering the perimeter or increasing the area actually under occupation by the 1st Marine Division.

The Battle of the Ridge was a greater victory, perhaps, than had been realized at the moment. The large numbers of Japanese dead spoke unmistakably of a strong and well equipped force. The fact that it had withdrawn to the southward, moreover, indicated that for the moment there was to be a respite.

To verify this, and to harry the retreating enemy, a patrol of two company strength was sent out from the 1st Battalion, 1st Marines in the early morning of 14 September, just after the last spasm of the attack upon Edson's positions had subsided. Following the right bank of the Lunga River, the patrol made contact at about 1100 when it came upon a bivouac several thousand yards south of the scene of the previous night's struggle. Fire from light machine guns killed one and wounded three of Cresswell's men, and the patrol withdrew to the perimeter.

Three days later, on 17 September, a similar patrol from the same battalion consisting of Companies A, B, and Headquarters Company, with a platoon of Company D attached, followed the same route. At 1330 it found proof that Kawaguchi, badly mauled though he had been, was still full of fight. A burst of fire from machine guns cut off one platoon of Company B, in the lead, and in spite of all efforts, the remainder of the patrol could not extricate them. A fire fight continued until the group received orders from division to

¹ The larger patrols generally included artillery forward observers, and direct artillery support was called down when needed. Letter, LtCol Louis A. Ennis to Commandant Marine Corps, 10 February 1949.

retire at 1600. The movement back to the perimeter was accomplished after dark, and the patrol reported three men wounded and brought back, and 18 missing in action. It was not until a week later when a third patrol was led into the area by Major Marion Fawcett that the fate of the 18 was definitely learned. They had fallen during the fire fight.²

COMING OF THE SEVENTH MARINES

On 18 September, the defensive problem of the perimeter took on a somewhat different aspect, for on that date the 7th Marines (reinforced) landed, 4,262 strong, and returned to Vandegrift's control. The return of this well equipped and highly trained unit had been accompanied by vicissitudes already familiar to other units of the division. On 20 June, before plans for an offensive had begun to take shape, King had advised Nimitz by dispatch that the regiment would be returned to the 1st Division on 1 September. On 20 August, Turner issued his plan for the occupation of Ndeni, for which task he chose the 7th Marines, since the 2d Marines were currently employed at Tulagi and Espiritu Santo. Then, as we have seen above, they were diverted from this operation and sent on their way to provide the amphibious troops that MacArthur needed for the balancing of his Southwest Pacific force.

While the regiment was en route, two commanders connected with the operation came to the same conclusion, namely, that the proper place for all available combat troops at the moment was at the scene of actual fighting. On 2 September, Vandegrift sent a strongly worded dispatch to Turner, in which he pointed out that the enemy was building up his land strength, that he (Vandegrift) did not have a well balanced force and needed planes and surface craft, and that he wanted the 7th Marines returned to his command.

² Report of Actions, 1st Battalion, 1st Marines. Entries 14, 17, and 26 September.

Ghormley, by this time, was beginning to be alarmed at the situation, as we have seen. The result of his alarm and Vandegrift's request was that the 7th Marines once more were diverted from their current objective and landed at the perimeter.

By that time also, still further units were on the way across the straits from Tulagi. On 14 September, the 3d Battalion, 2d Marines were ordered across by Vandegrift³ and two days later completed the passage. Reinforcing detachments that had been attached to the various rifle regiments began to return to their parent division units, and Vandegrift, for the first time, was able to alter his original plans and consider expanding the scope of his operations.

In this change, he was aided greatly by the fact that Geiger could now almost guarantee him at all times an operating force of about 60 planes. The unit designations of Geiger's mixed Cactus Air Force—Marine, Navy, and Army—by this time had begun to take on a kaleidoscopic quality that was never quite lost during the remainder of the campaign. Planes, pilots, and carrier "flights" came and went with a bewildering

³ *D-3 Journal*, entry 14 September.

informality that defeats every effort to sort them out.⁴ The great and outstanding quality of the local aviation, however, was that with it, the defenses of Henderson Field were deepened, and the enemy, whether he came by air or by surface craft, could be met far to the north of the field, and could only reach it after having fought his way to it.

In the words of the General's Final Action Report,

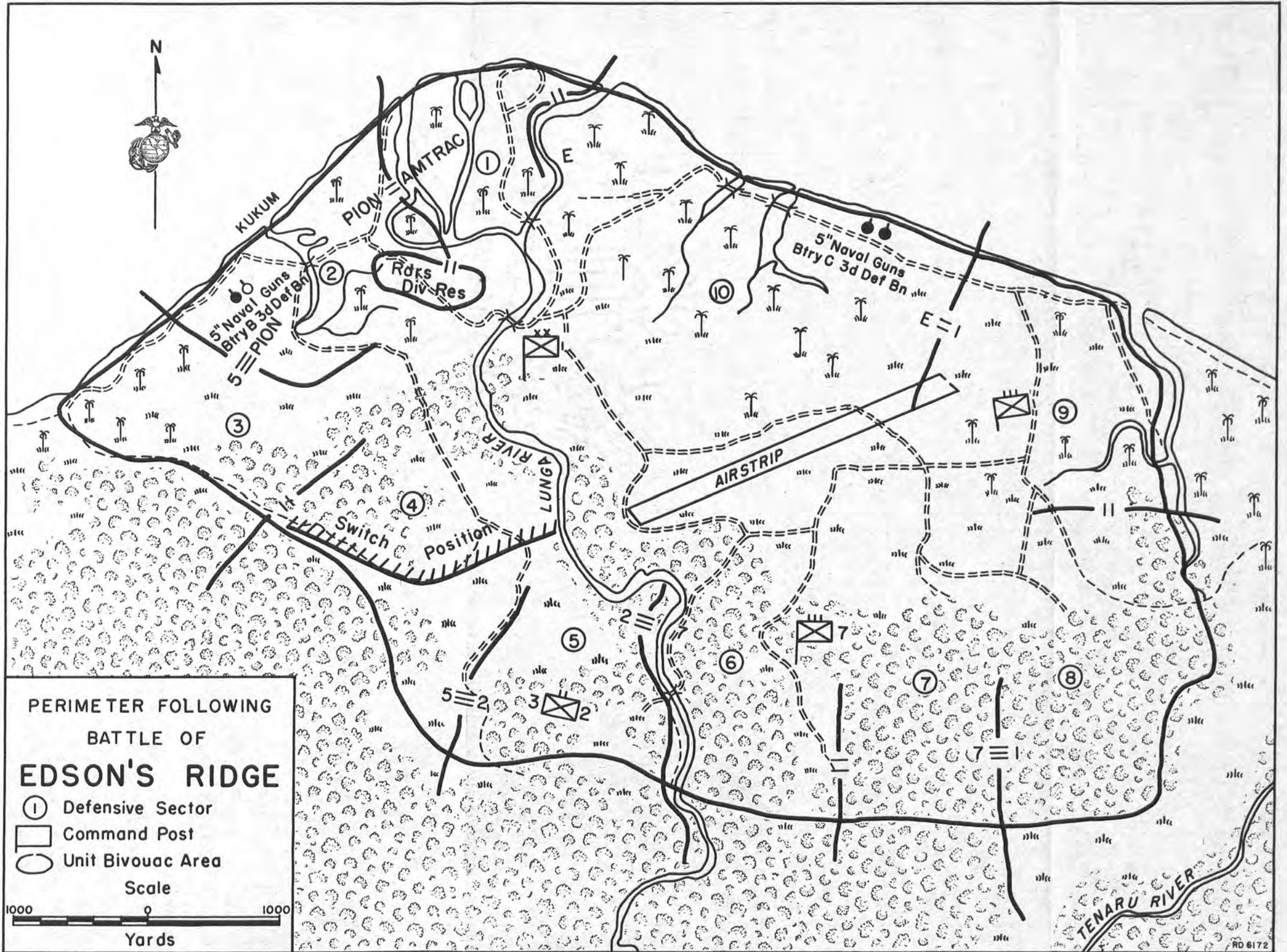
This accretion of force required us to re-examine and readjust our plans in accordance with improved circumstances and in the light of lessons learned from the bitter fighting of mid-September. Ten infantry battalions and one raider battalion were now available on Guadalcanal. These were supported by four battalions of artillery, a nearly complete defense battalion, a small provisional tank battalion, and a growing air force.

Operation Order 11-42, issued on 19 September, set forth the details of a complete perimeter defense, a defense which consisted of utilizing special units for beach defense and of employing rifle battalions for the more vulnerable inland defenses. The perimeter itself was divided into ten sectors, of which seven were manned by rifle battalions. It was found to be possible, as a result of the in-

⁴ *History of Marine Aviation in World War II*.



ADVANCED BASE AIR OPERATIONS, always much less formal, were carried on by BrigGen Geiger's *Cactus* Air Force with an economy of means which set records even for Marine aviation.



PERIMETER FOLLOWING
BATTLE OF
EDSON'S RIDGE

- ① Defensive Sector
- Command Post
- Unit Bivouac Area

Scale



Yards

crease in force, to arrive at a more satisfactory assignment of combat and administrative functions, for the nature of the beach defenses made it possible for those groups manning it to be employed in administrative duties by day and to be deployed tactically by night.

Furthermore, the concept of the perimeter was changing. Whereas the shortage of men, equipment, and supplies, together with the inadequacy of surface and air support, which had characterized the early days of the operation had dictated the policy of regarding the perimeter as both the initial and the final defensive position—and it will be remembered that two considerable battles had been fought on the perimeter—the greatly improved supply and support situation now made possible a change in that policy. The presence of an extra Marine regiment, and the knowledge that some Army ground troops (the 164th Infantry) were finally to be forthcoming, enabled General Vandegrift to contemplate a shift to a more active and aggressive type of defense.

Experience along the rivers, and particularly the experience gained on the night of 20–21 August at the mouth of Alligator Creek, indicated clearly that the initial defensive line could be extended in two directions to the Matanikau on the west, and the Tenaru on the east. In the case of the Matanikau, the immediate surroundings were such that crossings could be made only at highly localized points, and the terrain adjacent to those points afforded considerable advantage to the defending force. From its points of origin, far back in the jumbled foothills, the river flows through a deep, narrow valley, flanked on each side by steep ridges, and for the last mile of its course it becomes a deep and sluggish lagoon in a narrow, gorge-like valley. Only at a relatively short distance from the mouth do the hills flatten out in the narrow coastal plain.

An entirely different, but no less favorable, picture was presented by the Tenaru, at the opposite (east) side of the defensive positions. Here again a large river rises in the foothills, but instead of winding through pre-

cipitous and difficult country, it runs through plains land and jungle flats for almost all that part of its course which had a bearing on the problems of defense. On the far side, away from the perimeter, lies a succession of broad grassy plains, country admirably suited to the tactical deployment of troops and to the type of coordinated maneuver in which tanks and artillery could be used to greatest advantage.

Even the attitude of the commanding general toward the great difficult southward stretch of country between the inner flank extensions of the perimeter had changed. It had been seen that it was impossible to form and maintain a continuous line of defense, for the length of the sector and the character of the terrain which it crossed prevented any such development. It was rightly apprehended, also, that an enemy moving with some degree of caution could assemble large forces south of the airfield and could achieve some measure, at least, of surprise. This fear had been realized during the Battle of the Ridge.

That battle, however, had demonstrated another fact, which was that any enemy force coming into position for an attack upon that sector would have, perforce, to travel far inland and across terrain of a nature which virtually forbade the carrying of artillery or heavy crew-served weapons. The logistic aspect of such a movement presented problems far less capable of solution than were those which arose from a consideration of the defending of the area. Time-distance factors were so distorted by the chaotic nature of the terrain that planning with any degree of confidence was out of the question for an attacking force.

As it finally developed, two distinct types of defensive positions were used in defense of the sector. Along the grassy ridges to the west of the Lunga, it was possible to arrange defenses in depth, taking advantage of high bare ground along the hills. To the east of the Lunga, where the land falls to the jungle flats which border the upper reaches of the Tenaru, defense in depth was not feasible because of the sheer impossibility of cutting fields of fire for mutually supporting posi-

tions. Here, in effect, a cordon was established, based upon a series of foxholes and weapons emplacements behind a continuous wire barrier—two parallel bands of double apron fence with trip wires between the bands. Great pains were taken to make this line self-sustaining in the event that sections of it became isolated as a result of enemy penetration. Food and ammunition were stored at the line, and small mobile groups were placed at frequent intervals for use as reserves.

ACTION ON THE MATANIKAU, 24-26 SEPTEMBER

Strong patrol activity continued, as a result of which previous intelligence estimates were confirmed. There was a dearth of enemy activity to the southeast and very little of an alarming nature to the south and the southwest. In the territory among the foothills of the upper Lunga, occasional bands of survivors of the Kawaguchi detachments were moving gradually to the westward and the northwest in search of their fellows. To the west and the northwest, however, patrols found that there was evidence of gradually increasing numbers of Japanese. The same portentous kind of contacts began to be made that had preceded the battles of the Tenaru and the Ridge.

Enemy reinforcements were still being brought in. By the end of September, for example, the rest of the 4th Infantry and the entire 29th Infantry had been landed. About 600 replacements had also arrived for the badly mauled 124th Infantry, which had lost almost its entire 1st (Ishitari) Battalion in the assault on the positions of 3rd Battalion, 1st Marines.⁵

These reinforcement efforts were not being made without some hardship. On 21 September the destroyer *Kagero* was strafed by fighter planes from Henderson Field as she disembarked troops in the Kamimbo Bay area. Three days later, the destroyers *Kawakaze* and *Umikaze* were bombed and strafed at the same place, likewise by planes based on Henderson Field, and both were damaged.⁶

⁵ USAFISPA Report.

A night attack, with flares was made 22 September, on other destroyers near Visale. Damage was not determined.⁷

In spite of the contacts made with small enemy groups, however, and in spite of other items of intelligence brought in by patrols, there was still a wholly inadequate knowledge of the enemy situation. This was due, in part, to the fact that the enemy main bodies were far removed from the perimeter and therefore beyond the areas that could be covered by patrols. In part it was due also to the fact that heavy rain forest, such as that which covers the greater part of the island, offers almost perfect concealment from aerial observation.⁸ Whatever the cause, however, there was a lack of adequate intelligence, a fact that was brought out unequivocally in the following letter (quoted in part) :

It can be said that we had most faulty intelligence of Japanese strength and dispositions. No orders would ever have been given for a battalion to go up to Kokumbona and patrol from there had there been any realization that there were several thousand Japanese between the Matanikau and Kokumbona. Faulty intelligence was the cause of the whole breakdown at that time.⁹

Colonel Griffith here had reference to an action which came as near being a defeat as anything undertaken by the Marines during the entire campaign.

The action along the Matanikau during the period of 24-26 September was planned initially as two separate, though related, operations.¹⁰ In order to disrupt whatever plans the enemy might have for gathering a strong force in the area lying between the Matanikau River and Kokumbona, a reconnaissance in force by the 1st Battalion, 7th Marines, was to be conducted from 23 to 26 September in the territory lying in the hills between Mambulo and Kokumbona. On the latter date the 1st Raider Battalion was to strike west across

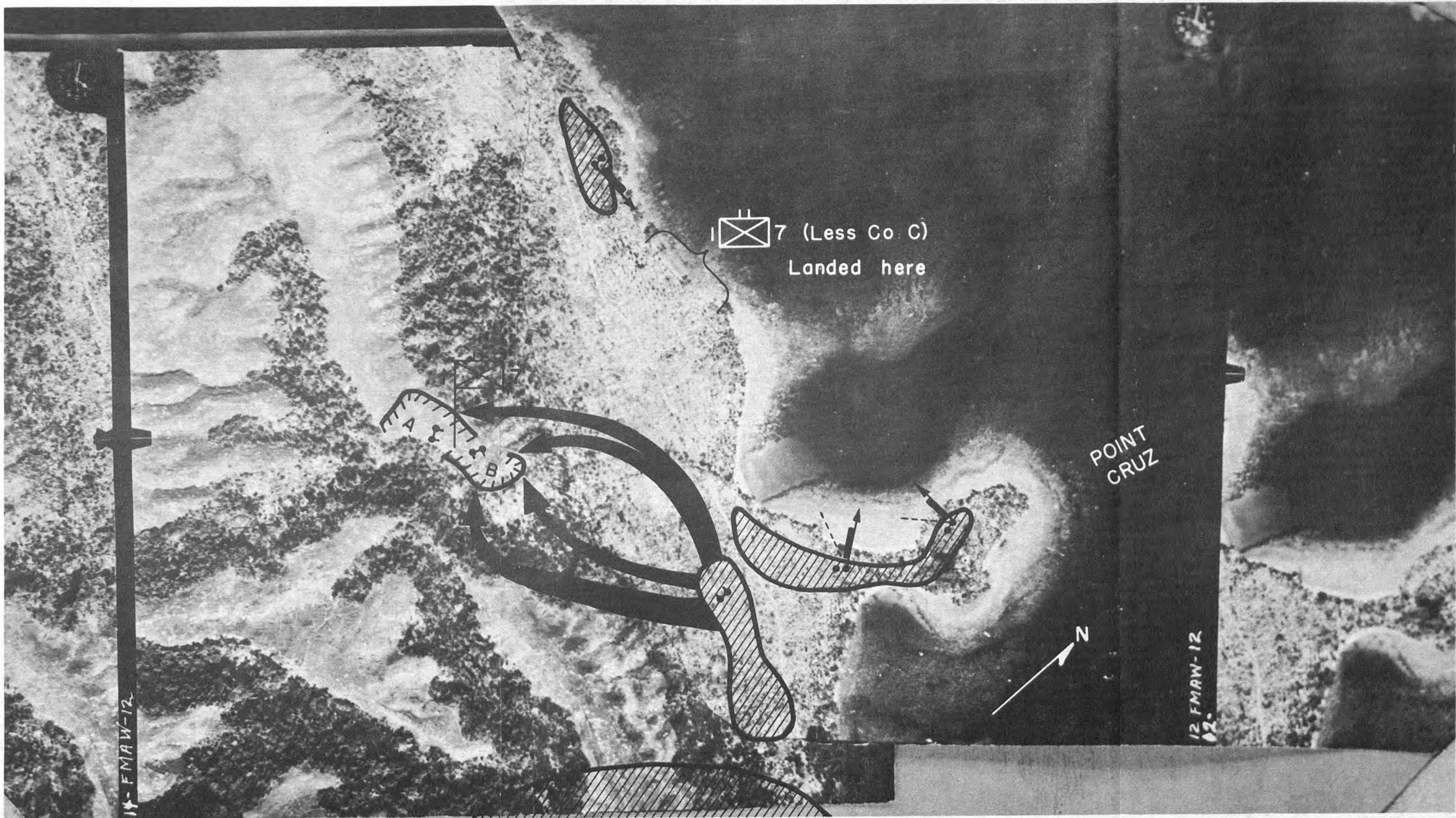
⁶ Robinson ms, p. 5.

⁷ WD, MAG-1, 22 September.

⁸ On 23 September, a newly arrived F4F-7 began flying photographic missions. WD, MAG-1, 23 September.


⁹ Letter, Colonel Samuel B. Griffith, II, to Captain Clifford Morehouse. Undated, but written and received in the autumn of 1945.


¹⁰ Final Report, Phase V., p. 5.



RD 6172

HEAVY PRESSURE ON THE 1st BATTALION, 7th MARINES, made it evident that retirement would be necessary.

USS BALLARD
Supports Withdrawal
of 1  7 27 Sept

1  7 (Less Co C)
27 Sept

Point
Cruz


USS BALLARD
Fire Support

Matanikou
River


Lunga Point
8000 Yards

 RDRS 1st Raider Battalion

Bivouac
Night
26 Sept

2  5
26 Sept

1  7
26 Sept

 RDRS
27 Sept

Enemy Force
in Position
27 Sept

Bivouac
Night
25 Sept

2  5






1  7

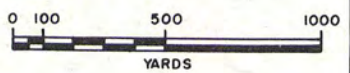
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(Joined 25 Sept)

24 Sept

**OPERATION ALONG THE
MATANIKAU
23 to 27 September**

-  Enemy Position
-  Enemy Attack
-  Enemy Withdrawal
-  Marine Positions
-  Marine Attack



the mouth of Matanikau toward Kokumbona, with the idea of establishing, if possible, a patrolling base at that village.

The 1st Battalion, 7th Marines, set out from the perimeter on the 23d, which passed without incident. The D-3 Journal contains no messages from that unit until late in the evening of 24 September, when, at 2030, Lieutenant Colonel Lewis B. Puller, commanding the battalion, reported that in the afternoon he had met and engaged an enemy force in bivouac, and that, in the resulting action, which had broken off at nightfall, he had suffered casualties of seven killed and 25 wounded, of whom 18 were stretcher cases. He requested air support for continuation of the action on the 25th and stretchers for removal of his wounded. An unknown number of casualties had been inflicted upon the Japanese, who had withdrawn.¹¹

It was apparent to General Vandegrift that evacuation of the wounded and dead would reduce the force by about 100 men—movement by stretcher being an exhausting process—and the knowledge that there was, in the neighborhood, an enemy force capable of inflicting such punishment after having been surprised, made it obvious that the battalion would have to be reinforced. It was also desirable, under the circumstances, to allow Puller—a veteran jungle-fighter of long Nicaraguan experience—to make his own decision as to continuing or withdrawing from his assigned mission.

Accordingly, at 2230, Colonel Puller was notified that, in addition to his requests for water, stretchers, and air support, an additional rifle battalion would report to him the next day, and that he was free to continue or to return, depending upon his situation in the morning.¹²

The action had resulted from the battalion's coming first upon a small party of enemy (an observation post of the Oka Detachment, in position nearby) on the north-west slopes of Mambulo (Mount Austen), busy at their rice fires. This group was struck and destroyed, but the noise alerted the main

body, with whom contact had not as yet been made. The ensuing action continued until nightfall, when the enemy withdrew.¹³ It was impossible to tell what enemy casualties had been, although numerous fresh graves seen the next day indicated that the Japanese had suffered more heavily than had the Marines.

The 2d Battalion, 5th Marines (Reaves) was sent out at 0500 on 25 September in accordance with the decision of General Vandegrift. It reported to Colonel Puller for duty at 0845. With this increase in force, Puller decided to continue the assigned mission, with minor changes.¹⁴ Companies A and B of the 7th Marines therefore returned to the perimeter with the casualties, under command of Puller's executive officer (Major Otho L. Rogers) while Company C and a portion of his headquarters, together with the reinforcing battalion from the 5th Marines began the advance westward, toward the Matanikau. The night passed without incident, with the Marines in bivouac east of the river.

The force did not reach the river itself until the 26th,¹⁵ the day originally set for the completion of the first phase of the operation. Immediately upon reaching the banks of the river, it began advancing northward toward the coastal road. At about 1400,¹⁶ while moving down the valley some hundreds of yards from the mouth of the river, the main body began receiving fire from enemy mortars in position near the village of Matanikau, on the opposite bank and near the coast, and from automatic weapons. It was apparent that the ridges west of the river were held in some strength by the enemy.¹⁷

¹¹ *D-3 Journal*, 25 September. Message 1 from Puller advised of the withdrawal of the enemy during the night.

¹² *Ibid.*, message 4, at 1815, Puller to Vandegrift, says, "Am taking C and Hq companies with 2d Bn 5th and moving on. . . . A and B Companies with casualties are returning to bivouac."

¹³ *Final Report*, Phase V, pp. 5 and 6.

¹⁴ *Second Battle of the Matanikau*. In *Summary of Operations*. 1st Battalion, 7th Marines. The point, consisting of a part of Company E, 5th Marines, was not fired on. Letter, Connor to CMC, 14 February 1949.

¹⁵ *Final Report*, Phase V, pp. 5 and 6.

¹¹ *D-3 Journal*, 24 September, message 12

¹² *Ibid.*, message 13.



THE JAPANESE HAD THE ADVANTAGE of prepared positions and dominating terrain.

The 2nd Battalion succeeded in working its way to the mouth of the river, but an attempt on the part of Company G, 5th Marines, supported by fire from Company E of the same regiment, to force a passage of the river mouth and engage the enemy on the far bank, was unsuccessful. A few men made their way to the overhang of the opposite bank, but the main body was pinned down by fire from automatic weapons.¹⁸ Casualties here amounted to 25 by 1600 on 26 September.¹⁹ The Japanese force had the advantage of prepared positions plus dominating terrain, in the shape of ridges, and to continue the attempts in the face of such opposition would have been to court disaster of exactly the type which the 1st Marines had visited upon the Ichiki Unit over a month before at the mouth of Alligator Creek.

The 1st Raider Battalion, meanwhile, had set out from the perimeter upon its assigned mission of making its way up the coast to Kokumbona. Developments at the mouth of the Matanikau, however, made accomplishment of such an objective completely out of the question.

¹⁸ Letter, Connor to CMC, 14 February 1949. "E-2-5 suffered its heaviest casualties of the campaign."

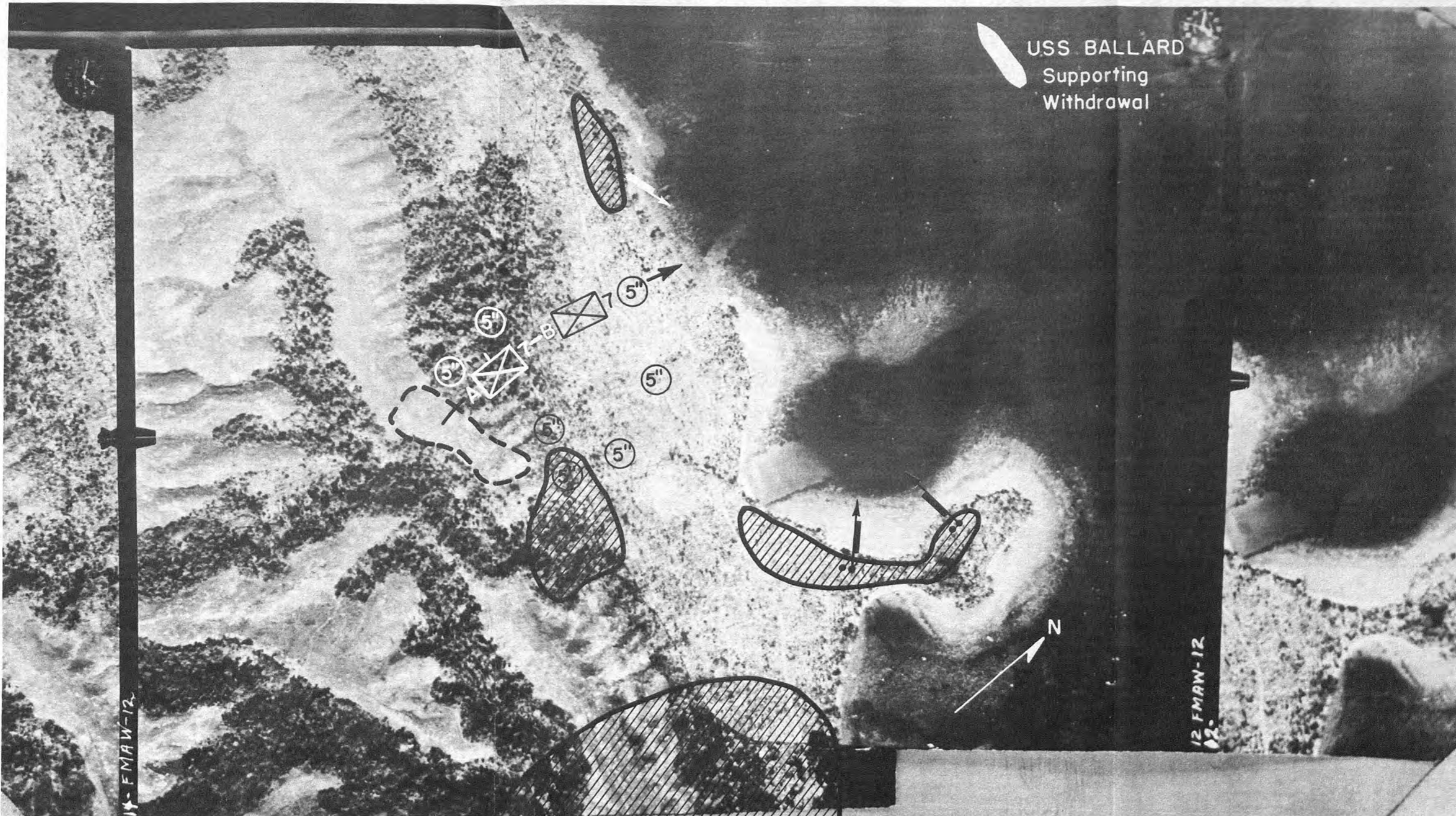
¹⁹ *D-3 Journal*, 26 September, message 18.

Thereupon began what was called by General Vandegrift²⁰ a series of "piecemeal commitments".²¹ It was decided that the Raiders would go up the east bank of the Matanikau cross at the fork which lies some 2,000 yards inland, and strike toward the right flank and the rear of the enemy force. The Puller group (elements of the 1st Battalion, 7th Marines plus the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines), from its position at the mouth of the river, would hold to that line and engage the enemy by launching an attack across the river in support of the Raiders. Air support would be forthcoming, and the artillery, which, from positions around the airfield and slightly west of the Lunga, could reach as far up the coast as the base of Point Cruz, would support the river crossing.

The action began early on the 27th with the movement of the Raiders to the point of their intended crossing. As the battalion approached the fork, however, it found that since the previous day a sizeable force of enemy had crossed to the east bank and had taken up strong positions, whence approach could be denied the Marine force. Heavy fire from mortars and from automatic weapons

²⁰ *Final Report*, Phase V, p. 8.

²¹ *Final Report*, Phase V, p. 6.



RD 6172

IN A TIGHT SPOT, the 1st Battalion, 7th Marines, withdraws from its dangerously exposed position west of Point Cruz under cover of naval gunfire and artillery support.

fell upon the advancing battalion, and the early salvos wounded Colonel Samuel B. Griffith, II, now commanding officer of the battalion, and killed his executive officer, Major Kenneth D. Bailey (who had earlier won the Medal of Honor for his action on Edson's Ridge). This fire, coming both from the front and from either flank, was skillfully delivered and succeeded not only in halting the advance, but in pinning down all subsequent attempts on the part of the Raiders to deploy.²²

From this point on, the attempted operation bogged down further and further. A message from the Raiders was either ambiguously worded or incorrectly received at division headquarters, for the latter, under the impression that the Raiders had succeeded in crossing the river before engaging the enemy, supposed that the projected attack upon Matanikau was under way. In order to assist in such a move, it was decided to send out the balance of the 1st Battalion, 7th Marines (Companies A, B, and D), under command of Major Rogers, by boat to the vicinity of Kokumbona, whence it could cut off all retreat by the "defeated" enemy. Support for the movement would be given by the destroyer *Ballard*. To support the efforts of the Raiders and the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines, moreover, the group could attack eastward, thus developing the attack upon Matanikau Village into an envelopment.²³

As the boats left the beach at Kukum, an enemy air raid developed, with two serious effects. Division communications were disrupted, and fire support from the *Ballard* was not forthcoming. That ship found it necessary to take evasive action to the detriment of its support mission.²⁴ The landing was made exactly on time, in two waves, and there was no opposition, the battalion having progressed well inland toward the ridges 500

²² Colonel Edson, who had been given command of the 5th Marines on 21 September (*Record of Events*, 5th Marines) had been placed in command of the joint force composed of 2d Battalion 5th and the Raiders at 1640 26 September. *D-3 Journal*, 26 September, message 21.

²³ *Final Report*, Phase V, p. 6.

yards away before the first enemy fire began to fall.

The first opposition was in the form of mortar fire, and one of the first shells to fall, just as the leading elements of the battalion reached the ridge line, killed the battalion executive officer, Major Otho L. Rogers, who was in command of the operation in the absence of the battalion commander, and severely wounded the commanding officer of Company B, Captain Zach D. Cox. At almost the same moment, a strong enemy column was observed coming from the direction of the Matanikau, and shortly thereafter it was engaged by the Marines.²⁵

The battalion succeeded in fighting its way to the top of the ridge and in setting up a perimeter defense. As this was being done, the Japanese, with entire freedom of movement, began working their way around the position. Enemy mortar fire was registered upon the small perimeter, and the seriousness of the situation was aggravated by the fact that Company D's 81mm mortar platoon had but one weapon and 50 rounds of ammunition.²⁶ Radio equipment had not been brought ashore, and this circumstance, of course, made it impossible to communicate with division headquarters or with the other units taking part in the operation.

The situation at this time, therefore, was that all three elements engaged were immobilized. At the mouth of the Matanikau, the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines, was held for no gain whatever and had already suffered some casualties in its attempt to cross. The Raiders, confronted by a strong and well emplaced enemy force on the east bank of the river, were in no position to do anything to further the joint effort, while the situation of the 1st Battalion, 7th Marines, was

²⁴ *Record of Events*, 5th Marines, entry of 27 September. *Summary of Operation*, 1st Battalion, 7th Marines, p. 3.

²⁵ *Summary of Operations*, 1st Battalion, 7th Marines, pp. 3 and 4.

²⁶ Mortar fire was laid on the enemy at a range of 200 yards. This made it necessary for the barrel of the weapon to be nearly vertical. One crew member lay on his back, feet braced against the weapon to keep it upright. *Ibid.*

precarious and rapidly growing worse.

Puller, who had remained with the mixed force along the Matanikau, realized from the situation at that point that his battalion would be in serious difficulties as a result of the miscarriage of plans. He therefore returned to the perimeter and secured permission to go by boat up the coast and to evacuate the unit. Shortly before this, Lieutenant Dale M. Leslie, the pilot of an SBD plane circling in the vicinity of the now beleaguered group, saw the word "Help" spelled out in white upon the ground within the perimeter a-top the ridge. He immediately passed this word to the 5th Marines, with which unit he was in radio contact.²⁷

The *Ballard*, with Puller on board, passed up the coast in company with the landing craft that had carried the battalion, and thereupon began a movement of withdrawal characterized by brilliance of improvisation and by individual heroism.

The battalion was, as we have seen, out of communication with its companion units²⁸ and with the perimeter. The fact that the enemy was in force between the ridge and the shoreline made it necessary that fires be laid down by the destroyer for the purpose of cutting a path through which the battalion could run the gantlet to the beach. Communication therefore was established by the only means available—semaphore signals from the ridge.

Here occurred the first of several deeds of individual heroism. In order to send and receive the vitally important messages, Sergeant Robert D. Raysbrook, voluntarily exposed himself, while semaphoring, to heavy enemy fire. His effort, which was rewarded by the Navy Cross from the United States as well as a comparable award from the British Government, was a complete success. Instructions were given and received, the necessary naval fires were delivered, and the battalion began making its way to the beach and the landing craft.

In the meantime, fire from 2d Battalion,

²⁷ *Summary of Operations*, 1st Battalion, 7th Marines, p. 5. Undershirts had been used as ground panels.

11th Marines, directed by observers on high ground on the right bank of Matanikau, was laid down near the base of Point Cruz, impeding enemy movement from the mouth of the river. This artillery battalion was in position west of the Lunga, on open terrain near Kukum.²⁸

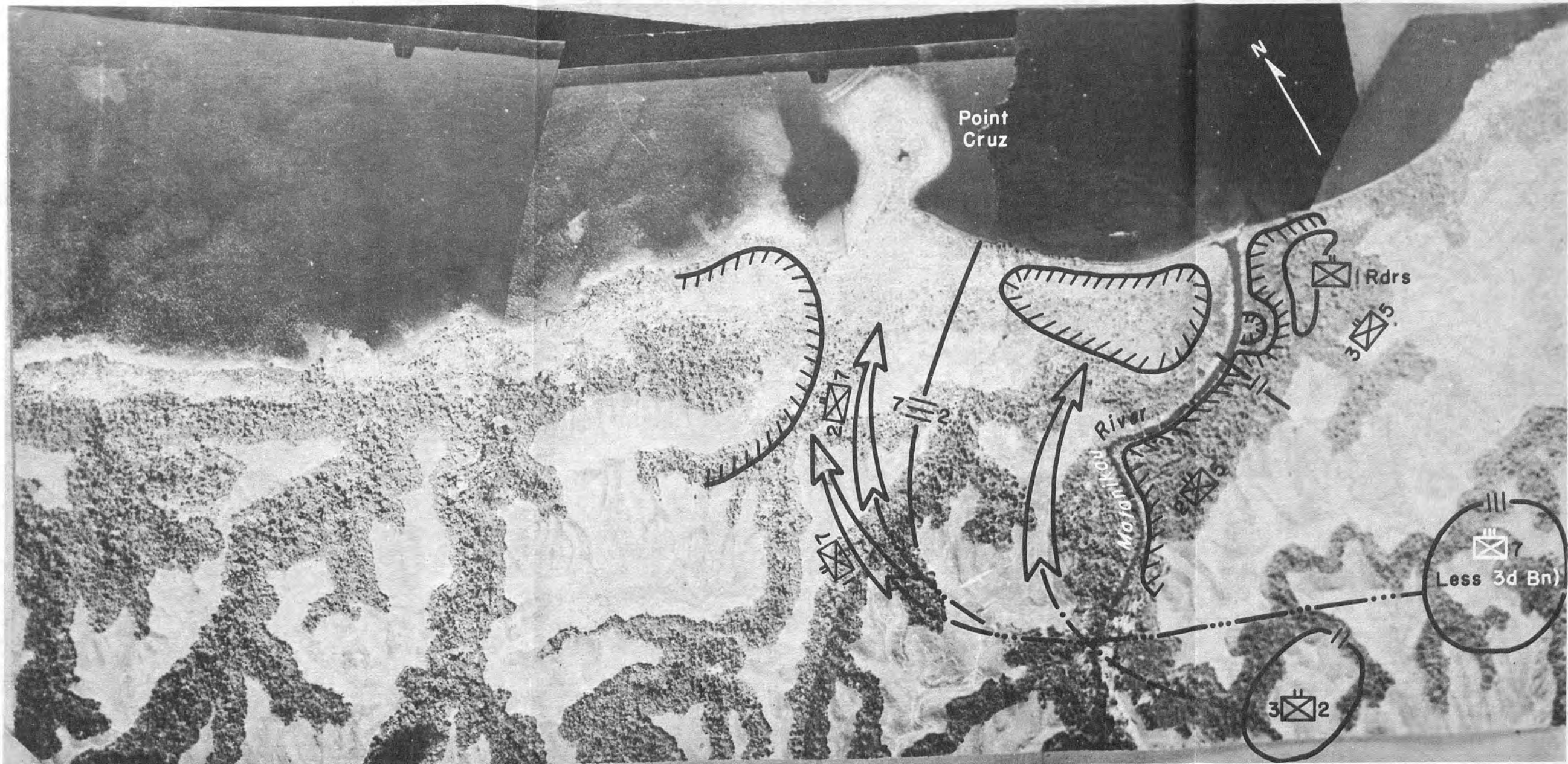
Withdrawal was executed under the severest difficulties. Company A, which led the movement, had set out, followed by Company B, when fire from enemy artillery emplaced to the northwest began registering on the battalion, causing several casualties. A second deed of heroism occurred here when Platoon Sergeant Anthony P. Malinowski, Jr., of Company A, singlehandedly covered the retreat of his company with a Browning automatic rifle until he was killed. The Navy Cross was awarded him posthumously.

A hasty defensive position was set up on the beach while the approach of the landing craft was being awaited.²⁹ The boats, however, were having a difficult time carrying out their part of the movement. Heavy Japanese fire, interlocking from the vicinity of Point Cruz to the east and Kokumbona somewhat to the west, disrupted the first wave and caused casualties among the defenseless but persistent Coast Guard and Navy personnel manning them. The remaining craft, discouraged by the reception thus afforded the first wave, were uncertain as to how to proceed, and once again the same SBD pilot who had taken an outstanding part in the maneuvering, Lieutenant Dale M. Leslie, of VMSB-231, demonstrated his courage and initiative. Flying low over the faltering craft he herded them in to the beach, meanwhile strafing the enemy positions on the shore.³⁰

²⁸ Letter from LtCol Louis A. Ennis, to CMC, dated 10 February 1949.

²⁹ *Final Report*, Phase V, p. 8.

³⁰ *Summary of Operations*, 1st Battalion, 7th Marines, pp. 6 and 7. According to this account, the performance of certain Coast Guard personnel in the evacuating landing craft was outstanding. One of them, Signaller 1st Class Douglas Munro, who was killed during the action, was awarded the Medal of Honor posthumously. Two Navy Coxswains, Walter T. Bennett and Samuel B. Roberts, both of whom were wounded, received Navy Crosses.



RD 6172

ACTION ON THE MATANIKAU from 7 to 9 October enabled General Vandegrift to establish forward positions in that area during the balance of the campaign.

The battalion was evacuated, after having suffered 24 killed and 23 wounded.³¹ All wounded were removed and all materiel was taken out. The return to Kukum was without further incident.

The enemy force which had held the Marines immobile during the operation and which had nearly succeeded in cutting off and destroying one battalion, was a strong one, and during the operation it had given the impression of having been well led and intelligently directed. Its size was estimated to be about 1800 men, and there was no indication that contact had been made with the entire enemy strength west of the Mantani-kau. No accurate information of the casualties inflicted upon the enemy was to be had, although it was felt that he had suffered something less than the 60 killed and the 100 wounded³² which was the total cost exacted from us for the lessons learned during the operation.

ACTIONS ON 7-9 OCTOBER

The destruction of the Japanese west of the Matanikau continued to be the ultimate objective of the Marines. An immediate objective, and one that could be attained while sufficient strength was building up for the final blow, was that of so disrupting enemy plans that his forces would be kept off balance and that he would not be able to launch a coordinated attack upon the perimeter. Operation Plan 2-42³³ was issued in accordance with this train of thought. The force employed was to consist of something in excess of five rifle battalions—5th Marines (less 1st Battalion); 3d Battalion, 2d Marines (plus Scout-Sniper detachment); and 7th Marines (less 3d Battalion)—with strong and carefully coordinated artillery and air

³¹ *Record of Events*, 7th Marines, "Puller's Patrol."

³² *Final Report*, Phase V, p. 9. *War Diary*, Commander, Task Force 62, September, gives the casualties as 42 killed and 129 wounded, but it is felt that the 1st Marine Division was somewhat closer to sources and its report somewhat more accurate.

³³ *Ibid.*, Annex D.

support. The operation was to be carried out directly under division control, and there was a reserve force of one battalion—3d Battalion, 1st Marines. The plan contained a hint that the latter unit would be used in a shore-to-shore movement, for there was provision for a boat group, and the reserve was ordered to be prepared to move out on 30 minutes' notice.

The plan for the attack followed roughly that for the unsuccessful affair which had preceded it. There was to be a force (5th Marines) along the east bank of the river for a distance of 1800 yards upstream from the mouth, while the main assault forces 3d Battalion, 2d Marines plus Scout-Snipers, (called the "Whaling Group" from the name of the officer commanding the Scout-Snipers, Colonel William J. Whaling)³⁴, and the 7th Marines, operating to the left of the 5th Marines would cross the river at the point of the unsuccessful attempt of the previous week and attack northward across the high ground to the south of Matanikau village with the village as the objective. The formation for this attack would consist of the Whaling Group advancing across the ridges with its right flank along the river, while the 7th, following across the river, would operate on its left, seizing the high ground to the southwest of Point Cruz and cutting off the retreat of the enemy. October 8th was designated as D-day.

October 7th saw the advance begun from the perimeter by the assigned groups.³⁵ By midmorning the leading element—3d Battalion, 5th Marines—had made contact with

³⁴ Colonel Whaling had been promoted from lieutenant colonel after his arrival on the island, and immediately there arose the question of a proper command for him. Instead of leaving the island, where there was no opening for one of his rank, he remained to select and train a body of men as scouts. This valuable work was undertaken because patrolling in the early days of the campaign had been somewhat less than satisfactory and because the colonel himself was an accomplished woodsman with a flair for work of the kind. The groups subsequently referred to in the narrative consisted generally of his highly trained scouts plus a battalion assigned him for the task of the moment.

³⁵ *Final Report*, Phase V, p. 10.

an enemy force of approximately one company strength in the coastal area immediately east of the Matanikau, and a short distance inland from the mouth. (In this vicinity the coastal plain narrows down to a restricted corridor and save for an extremely narrow cocoon grove along the beach, it is thickly overgrown with typical lowland jungle.)

In the face of pressure from the advancing battalion, the enemy group fell back slowly, finally going into position in a prepared area containing foxholes, emplacements for machine guns, and standing trenches. Beginning at a point about 75 yards inland from the mouth of the river, and extending along its right bank for 150 yards upstream, the enemy position was in fact a well prepared bridgehead. A few of the enemy force, upon retreating, had passed across the sand bar at the mouth of the river. Approximately 150 remained at the east bank strong point.

By late afternoon of 7 October, the battalion was containing the bridgehead with Company I on the right, at the mouth of the river, Company L in the center, and Company K on the left. Several attempts were made by the beleaguered force to cut its way out and retreat across the river; these attempts were turned back by the right flank elements of Company I.

During the afternoon, Edson had requested reinforcements.³⁶ In compliance, Vandegrift ordered the 1st Raider Battalion forward by companies to report to him. At 1530, Company A was ordered to pass up the coastal road with a machine gun section of Company E attached and report to Edson for duty.

During the night, the enemy made several strong attempts to break out of the encirclement and gain the bar at the mouth of the river. All these blows were delivered down the bank of the river, and all of them entailed hand-to-hand fighting on the part of Company I and its supporting troops from Company M. None of the sallies was successful, but by morning it was necessary to relieve the company.

³⁶ *D-3 Journal*, 7 October, message 17.

At 0500 the Raider company was ordered into the positions, with Company I passing to the rear. At the same time, Company C, Raiders, was ordered up from its bivouac on the western edge of the perimeter. By early afternoon, the remainder of the Raider Battalion was ordered up and passed to the command of Major Walt, of the 5th Marines.³⁷

By nightfall, the enemy position was encircled by Companies A and B, Raiders, on the right, Companies K and L, 5th Marines on the left, and the 3d platoon, Company M, 5th Marines, still in position commanding the mouth of the river. At 1830 there was a final determined effort on the part of the enemy to break free, and their rush struck at the Raiders' positions. Heavy-hand-to-hand fighting took place again, with the elements of Company M involved again.

The enemy force was wiped out, 59 bodies being counted the next day. The Raiders suffered most heavily during the last stages of the engagement, losing 12 killed and 22 wounded.³⁸

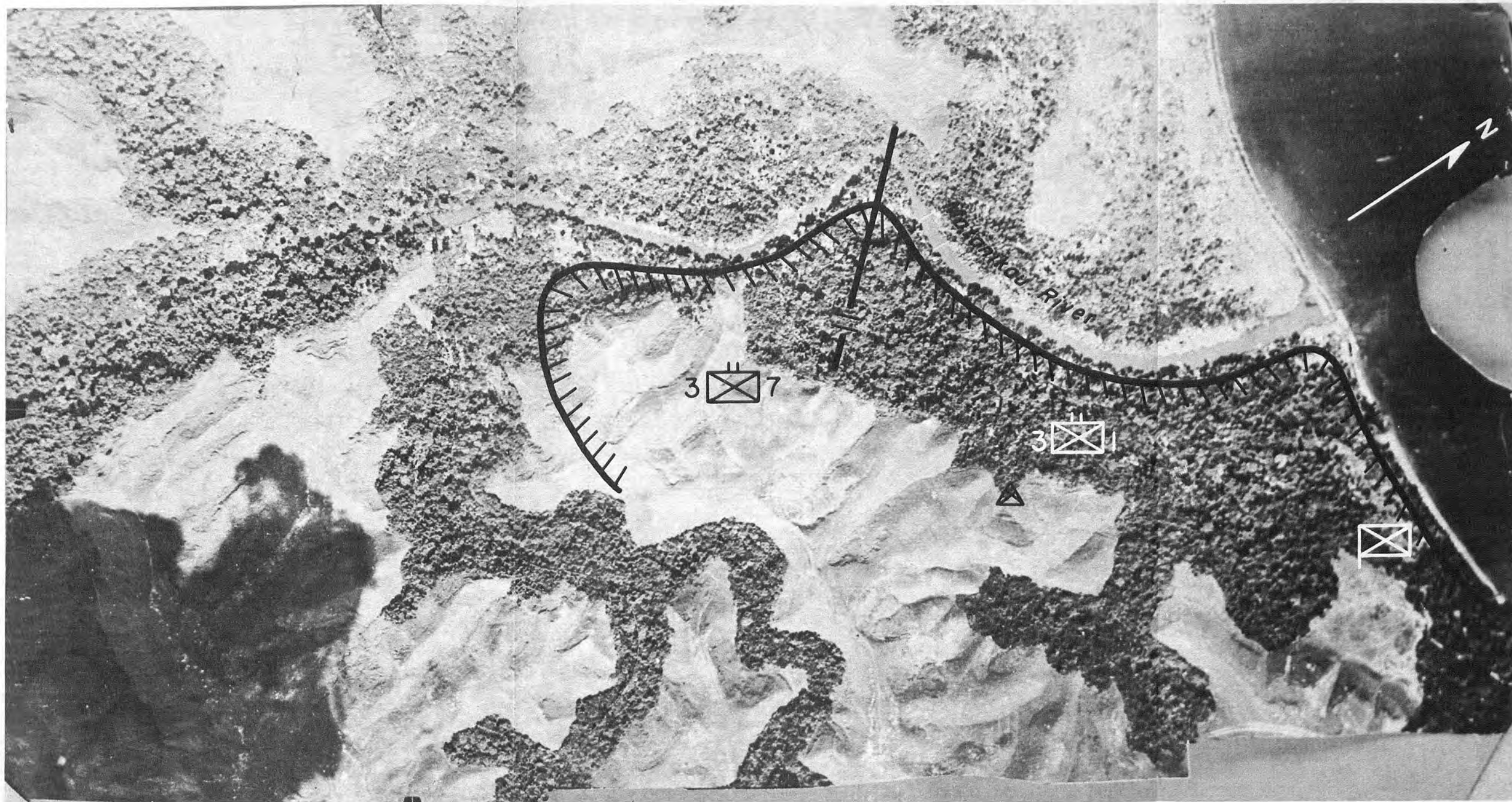
It is indicative of the intensity of the struggle that the commanding officer of the 5th Marines, in an endorsement to the report of the Raider Battalion, suggested that the latter group be cited for their conduct during the action.

Torrential rains prevented launching of the attack on 8 October,³⁹ and the fact that postponement until the 9th was inevitable

³⁷ *Report of Operations, 7-9 October*, 1st Raider Battalion. The Raider Battalion now consisted of Companies A, B, C, and E, and battalion headquarters. Company D, as we have seen, had been used as a replacement source, and by this time had disappeared entirely save as an administrative nucleus. The battalion strength at the time was in the neighborhood of 200 men — casualties and illness, with no replacements, had reduced the strength of all units on the island. Letter from LtCol William H. Barba to Commandant Marine Corps, 29 January 1949.

³⁸ Details of the operation have been taken from the *Final Report*, Phase V, *Report of Operations, 7-9 October*, 1st Raider Battalion, and letters from individual officers involved in the affair — in particular the detailed letter submitted by LtCol Barba quoted above.

³⁹ *Final Report*, Phase V, p. 11.



RD 6172

HORSESHOE DEFENSE ALONG THE MATANIKAU was established by General Vandegrift in October in order to keep the Japanese at arm's length from Henderson Field and the perimeter itself.

caused some disquiet to General Vandegrift, who realized that a good share of the element of surprise would be lost thereby. The patent impossibility of movement could not be disputed, however, and the postponement accordingly was authorized.

During the day it was learned, from intelligence sources which included aerial observation and information from coast-watchers, that a strong and concerted attack against the Marine positions was impending.⁴⁰ Concentrations of ships in Rabaul and signs of accelerated activity in that port indicated that the attack would be strongly supported and might take the form of an assault landing on the perimeter.⁴¹ There was also the possibility that the enemy landing might be delivered at a point which would cut off the forces operating to the westward, since there was no continuous defensive position between that area and the perimeter.

This information impelled General Vandegrift somewhat to alter his plans for the offensive. It had been projected that, in the event the operation to the northward was successful, the 5th Marines would attack across the river mouth, pass through the Whaling Group, and drive westward through Kokumbona. If, in turn, this movement was successful, it was planned to leave a permanent garrison at the latter village to prevent future gathering of strong enemy forces in the area.⁴²

The impending operation from Rabaul, however, made such a step impractical in the extreme, for the withdrawal of the number of men necessary to its accomplishment would weaken the defenses of the perimeter itself. Therefore, it was decided that the attack on Matanikau would be launched as originally planned, and the village and the enemy force in it would be destroyed. Immediately thereafter, the assault force would withdraw in successive echelons along the coastal road, which goes through the village.

The attack, therefore, went forward, and

was attended by success in every way. The Whaling Group, attacking toward the sea with its right flank on the left bank of the Matanikau secured the western bank of the river all the way to the mouth. Immediately on its left, the 2d Battalion, 7th Marines, meeting somewhat stronger resistance in the neighborhood of the village, drove through it to the base of Point Cruz, while still farther west, in the left zone of the advancing force, the 1st Battalion, 7th Marines engaged in one of the most spectacular of the actions of the campaign.⁴³

The territory over which the 1st Battalion was operating consisted of the usual grassy ridges interspersed with overgrown ravines, and in this area some resistance had been encountered in the advance toward the coastal plain. It was not until it reached the last ridges overlooking the plain, however, that the battalion met a strong concentration of enemy troops.

At this point, Puller received orders from Colonel Sims, commanding officer of the regiment, to reconnoiter the coastal road toward Kokumbona, and to refrain from becoming involved in large actions. Puller advised Sims of his situation and was given permission to carry on.⁴⁴

On the left and to the front, the high ground on which the battalion found itself was bounded by deep and thickly forested ravines, in which were strong bodies of enemy, elements of the 4th Infantry. Puller immediately called for artillery fire upon the ravine to his front while he brought fire from all available mortars on that lying on his left. Then began a period of scientific extermination.

The enemy troops, unable because of the demoralizing effect of the artillery and mortar concentrations to assemble for counterattack, broke and attempted to flee over the ridges beyond the ravines. As they did so, necessarily coming into the open and within range of effective flat-trajectory fire from

⁴⁰ *Final Report*, Phase V, p. 11.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 12 and 13.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 12.

⁴³ *Final Report*, Phase V, p. 12.

⁴⁴ *Summary of Operations*, 1st Battalion, 7th Marines, 7-9 October.

automatic weapons, they were subjected to such fire and cut to pieces. The survivors attempted to regain the illusory shelter of the ravines, and, once again, the rain of fire from artillery (1st, 2d, and 5th Battalions, 11th Marines) and mortars drove them out.⁴⁵

This process of extermination was carried out until mortar ammunition began to be exhausted and it was time for withdrawal. The battalion commander, having no way of estimating enemy losses, could only say that they had been heavy. It remained for an enemy officer himself to supply the missing details, for, later in the campaign, a diary was found that had been kept by an officer of the enemy regiment involved, the 4th Infantry. An entry told of the loss of 690 men from that regiment alone in the encounter with the 1st Battalion, 7th Marines.

One detail of the battle deserves mention here as being yet another example of the degree to which the element of good fortune entered into the picture. Documents found on the body of a Japanese officer who died during the operation were translated, and confirmed what had been surmised by the Marine planners, namely, that the presence of Japanese forces to the east of the river, and the concentration immediately west of Matanikau which had been struck and cut to pieces by the 1st Battalion, 7th Marines, indicated that the enemy, when attacked, had himself been on the point of launching an offensive. A Japanese operation had been planned against the perimeter, and the date set for the beginning of the attack was exactly that which had been set for the Marine assault—8 October. A curious part of the enemy plan was that the tactics to be used were essentially the same as those used by the Marines. A crossing near the fork of the river was to be accompanied by an attack at the mouth of the river, which was designed to allow artillery to be displaced forward to a spot whence the airfield could be brought

⁴⁵ *Final Report*, Phase V, p. 12. During this operation, the artillery batteries were manned by double crews; 2188 rounds of 75mm ammunition were expended by the pack howitzers and 1063 rounds of 105mm by the heavier weapons. *Ibid.*, Annex R.



LTCOL HAROLD W. BAUER, whose VMF-212 had shielded Efate and Espiritu Santo months before Guadalcanal, won a posthumous Medal of Honor for his prowess as a fighter pilot and squadron commander after reaching the island.

under fire. Other attacks were to be launched from inland, at unspecified points.⁴⁶

THE BATTLE OF CAPE ESPERANCE

On 7 October, the day which marked the beginning of the series of actions along the Matanikau, a small naval task force sortied from Espiritu Santo to take up position near the Russell Islands. Its mission was to disrupt the enemy's supply and reinforcements from the Northern Solomons and Rabaul, as well as to protect the convoy which was

⁴⁶ *Final Report*, Phase V, p. 13.

bringing the first units of the Americal Division. Commanded by Rear Admiral Norman Scott, the force consisted of heavy cruisers *San Francisco* and *Salt Lake City*, light cruisers *Helena* and *Boise*, and destroyers *Buchanan*, *Duncan*, *Farenholt*, *Laffey*, and *McCalla*.

Three forces were now operating in the Lower Solomons. One, formed around the carrier *Hornet*, was generally in position to the west of Guadalcanal, while a second, with the new battleship *Washington* as its main strength, was on station east of Malaita. Admiral Scott's cruiser force was the third, and it was destined to meet and inflict a definite defeat upon a comparable enemy force.⁴⁷

At 1345, 11 October, enemy forces were reported on the way down the "Slot", the stretch of water lying between the parallel chains that form the Solomon Islands Group. This report came as Scott's task force was cruising south of Guadalcanal, our patrol planes advising that the enemy consisted of cruisers and destroyers 210 miles northwest, on a course that would bring them to the island.⁴⁸ At 1810 a second report placed it 110 miles distant, and Admiral Scott immediately set out for the Cape Esperance area in order to intercept about midnight.

By 2200 the converging forces were nearing each other, and at this time the cruisers catapulted their float-planes for local search. One plane from the *Salt Lake City* crashed and burned in the water some distance from its parent ship, and the enemy, apparently taking the resulting glare for a signal light from shore, answered it with searchlights. At 2230, search planes reported one transport and two destroyers close inshore near Tassaronga, but these craft were ignored and departed the area at 0230 the next morning.

About two minutes after this report, radar contact was made with the enemy force by the *Boise* and the *Helena*, at a range of about

18,000 yards. Fourteen minutes later the *Helena* opened 6-inch fire on the leading targets, and the enemy was taken completely by surprise. The *Aoba*, was struck heavily by the first salvo, suffering severe damage and many casualties, Goto himself being mortally wounded. The destroyer *Fubuki* likewise was struck at this time. Cruiser *Furutaka* was struck shortly afterward and suffered damage which resulted in her sinking within two hours.

Admiral Scott's force had succeeded in performing the classic maneuver of crossing the T, and the enemy force was thereby put at a disadvantage whence it could not extricate itself. Individual enemy ships were successful in inflicting casualties on Scott's force, which included the sinking of the destroyer *Duncan* and major damage forward to the *Boise* and the *Farenholt*. Light damage was suffered by the *Salt Lake City*.

Enemy losses were more severe. The cruiser *Furutaka* and the destroyer *Fubuki* were sunk, and heavy damage was suffered by flagship *Aoba* and minor damage by *Kinugasa*. As an aftermath, the destroyers *Murakumo* and *Natsugumo*, the only units to emerge unscathed from the engagement, were sunk the next day.

They fell prey to a mixed force of planes from Henderson Field, which found them north of the Russell Islands. Leaving the airstrip at 0515, five SBD's led by Lieutenant Commander Eldridge, 11 led by Lieutenant Colonel Cooley, escorted by 16 F4F-4's and eight newly arrived P-39's attacked the pair and inflicted visible damage. Three hours later, another flight (four Navy and two Marine SBD's, six torpedo bombers, and 14 F4F-4's) came up with them 170 miles from the field. This time one of the ships was left dead in the water, victim of a torpedo hit from one of the TBF's. During the afternoon, a final strike by still another mixed force accounted for another destroyer.⁴⁹ Enemy Cruiser Division 6 ceased to exist as a tactical unit after this defeat.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ WD, MAG-23, and History of Marine Corps Aviation in World War II.

⁵⁰ *Robinson ms.*

⁴⁷ Information gained from translation of enemy documents captured on 9 October was of great value to Admiral Scott. *Final Report*, Phase V, Annex N.

⁴⁸ The enemy force consisted of the heavy cruisers *Aoba*, flying the flag of Rear Admiral Goto, *Furutaka*, and *Kinugasa*, and the destroyers *Fubuki* and *Hatsuyuki*. *Robinson ms.*



THE GUADALCANAL
CAMPAIGN

CHAPTER VII

Expansion to the West and
The October Attack on the Airfield



MALARIA BEGAN TO MAKE ITSELF FELT by October. Most of the Marines in this former Japanese sick bay are suffering from malaria, as great a casualty-producer in jungle war as enemy bullets.

AT THE END of 60 days of tension, combat, inadequate food, and complete uncertainty as to when—or if—they would be relieved, the Marines began to suffer still another ener-

vating affliction. Malaria, of the benign tertian form, began to make itself felt with ever increasing insistence. By the second week in October, over 700 cases had been reported to

the medical officers from 1st Division Units alone. (No record is available of the incidence in the attached 2d Division troops.) During the next week, 655 new cases were reported. From that point onward to a time far beyond the end of the campaign, the disease continued to sap the strength and vitality and initiative of the men infected.¹

All elements of Vandegriff's command had by now been through at least one grueling engagement. The Parachute Battalion, badly cut up in the unexpectedly violent engagement on Gavutu, had left the island. The Raiders, having suffered casualties on Tulagi, had been badly ground down by the struggle on the Ridge, where the airfield had been saved by their tenacity. They had suffered again in the brief, violent affair described above, and their effectiveness as a fighting unit was nearly at an end. The 5th Marines had fought beside the Raiders in all three engagements, although they had in no case borne the brunt of the action. The 1st Marines, having turned back the first blow at the mouth of Alligator Creek, had likewise participated in an ancillary action while Edson and Kawaguchi were fighting it out on the south sector, although their casualties in that engagement were small. The 2d Marines, aside from their well-conducted cleanup of Tanambogo, had not been involved in further action, although the patrolling of Florida had been of considerable value from an intelligence point of view.

The problem of replacements and reinforcement of the weakened garrison was a constant worry to Ghormley. We have seen that the original plans, as voiced by King, had called for an immediate replacement of the assault troops by Army personnel, to the end that the highly trained Marines might quickly be prepared for further operations where their amphibious techniques, sharp-

¹ *Final Report*, Phase V, Annex T, p. 6. Even men showing no clinical evidence of the disease suffered from extreme fatigue after only moderate physical effort. Members of patrols operating inside enemy territory would suddenly collapse with weariness and lack of willingness to make effort, and would only respond to the most violent stimuli—generally the threat of being left lying.

ened and perfected by experience, would be at a premium. We have also seen that the original concept was nullified at once by Marshall, whose commitments to the European theater would not permit of his diverting troops to the South Pacific. Finally, we have seen that Ghormley was forced to make the best of what he privately considered to be a bad decision—he was forced to push troops forward from the rear areas of his command, some of which he still considered to lie under threat of an enemy assault.

He was convinced, however, of the vital importance of reinforcing the Guadalcanal forces. His diversion of the 7th Marines was an acknowledgment that as between training troops for hypothetical future employment by the commander of the Southwest Pacific Area and employing fresh troops where a crucially important advance base was in danger, there could be but one choice.

On 7 October, while the 5th Marines were deploying along the Matanikau and while the weary Raiders were being sent up, company at a time, for one more blow at the enemy prior to departure for rest, Ghormley began stripping his rear areas. On that day he ordered Harmon to prepare one regiment of the New Caledonia garrison for movement to Guadalcanal. Next day he directed Turner to embark the 164th Infantry and depart Noumea on 9 October.²

Experience gained in the Matanikau operations indicated that the line of that river was of vital importance to any force holding and defending the airfield. As long as the enemy could be denied the crossing of this line and the subsequent use of areas east of the river for the purpose of emplacing artillery and using it against the airfield, he would

² *Ghormley ms*, p. 130. Ghormley and Vandegriff were not alone in their misgivings. As early as the end of August, Under Secretary of the Navy James V. Forrestal returned to Noumea after a quick trip to the scene of action and gave it as his opinion to Ghormley that if the people of the United States knew on what a "shoestring" the operation was being conducted, and how serious were the shortages of supply and air, surface, and ground forces, there would be a revolution at home. *Ghormley ms*, p. 110.

be restricted to employment of only his heavy caliber long range weapons.

It was necessary for the Marines to control both of the two main crossings—at the mouth of the river, and at the point where it was crossed by the so-called Nippon Bridge.³

Of the two, that at the mouth of the river, where the coastal track followed the beach line and offered the only feasible route for tanks and heavy weapons, was by far the more important, and it was at that point that the defenses were centered.

The defense of the perimeter itself required the use of all but two of the rifle battalions on the island.⁴ With so small a defending force it was impossible to build up a continuous line along the more vulnerable section of the river front. Once again it was necessary for General Vandegrift to strike a balance between needs and available means, and to take advantage of every favorable terrain feature.

³This is a term which appears frequently in connection with the actions along the Matanikau. Built by the Japanese early in the campaign (perhaps even before the 7 August landings) it appears on all captured enemy maps of the area. The Japanese characters describing it were transliterated as "ippon-bashi", which would be translated as a bridge constructed of a single log, a "one-tree" bridge. To the Americans, this transliterated word was meaningless, but it called to mind at once the more familiar word Nippon. Thence the name. It was a small footbridge across the river at a point approximately 2000 yards inland. In regard to the name, however, another possibility must be noted. The same two characters, with one tiny difference, appear at numerous points on maps of areas west of the Matanikau and are always translated "one tree" or "lone tree." Since these areas without exception are covered with palms or with rain forest trees, the assumption that they are used descriptively simply does not make sense. It is far more likely that they are a unit name. The characters for *ippon* differ from *ichi ki* by only one tiny stroke. It may well be that the character labelling the bridge is actually the same as the similar ones appearing elsewhere on the map, and that the bridge actually was known to the Japanese as the Ichiki Bridge, in tribute to the ill-fated colonel who clashed with Pollock's battalion on 21 August. There was, however, a fallen tree which was used as a crossing, about 2000 yards from the mouth. (Comments, Lt-Col. Hewitt D. Adams, 4 January 1949.)

⁴*Final Report, Phase V*, p. 14.

In the case of the defenses of the river crossings, the alternative to a continuous line was the establishment of a horseshoe position. This type of defense had been considered for the perimeter, but found to be impracticable. Such a position was established, fronting along the river, from mouth to Nippon Bridge, the right flank refused along the beach line and the left partially refused across high ground above the river. This was done in spite of the fact that it was known to be possible to cross the river at a number of points farther inland, for it was felt that even should such crossings be made (as in fact they were) the terrain to be traversed afterward by the attacking force would be so difficult as to offer a fairly good defense in itself.

Both the Allied Nations and the Japanese were now increasing their efforts in the Guadalcanal area, and the units at that point of contact, both friendly and enemy, were subjected to constantly increasing and unremitting pressure. These relatively small opposing forces, each with the concentrated weight and power of a great nation behind it, were in fact the only physical junction at the moment between those nations. The strain, mental as well as physical, was tremendous.

Records indicate that of the two the Japanese were in the better condition, for not only did they have relative freedom of movement over most of the island, but they had also much freer access to their own rear areas. While the presence of American planes on Henderson Field had operated to restrict somewhat the free movement of surface craft in the waters around the island, it was still possible for the enemy to move men in by darkness from destroyers at the rate of 900 per night.⁵ Fresh troops arriving at frequent intervals undoubtedly served to keep morale at a high level as well as to relieve the tension somewhat for those who had been long on the island.

⁵"Enemy destroyers landed approximately 900 troops per night until the Japanese strength on Guadalcanal reached a peak of some 26,000 Army troops and 3,000 special naval attack troops." *USAFISPA Report*, p. 9.



AIR EVACUATION, long relied upon by the Marine Corps, flew out 2,879 casualties from Guadalcanal between 7 August and 9 December.

The Marines, on the other hand, remained, as a matter of necessity, effectively confined to the perimeter, their entire force being situated in an area so restricted in size as to present an optimum target to the air and surface strikes launched against it. There was no possibility of maneuver or concealment save within the confines of that area—and the airfield, with its surrounding dumps of gasoline and ammunition, was, and remained, a vulnerable, often-hit target.

Some of the problems which had operated to worry the Marines far more than had the enemy during the early weeks of the campaign had been, or were in process of being solved. The flow of supply to the island from the rear bases at Wellington and Noumea had, by the middle of October, increased from nothing during the first fortnight to a steady, adequate, and constantly growing stream. The increased strength and activity of the American air, and the growing strength and confidence of the surface forces operating in the vicinity, had tended to make passage safer for American supply vessels while at the same time rendering the neighborhood dangerous for enemy activity.

Air supply and air evacuation (normal to Marine Corps operations since the Nicaraguan campaign 15 years earlier) were developed and improved during the period. Marine Corps R4D planes delivered vitally important aviation gasoline to the airfield in large quantities,⁶ and evacuation planes, equipped to handle casualties, could remove 18 stretcher cases or 36 sitting or ambulant cases. During the period 7 August to 9 December, the date upon which General Vandegrift relinquished command to the Army, a total of 3,919 cases were evacuated by sea and air, and of this total, 2,879 were flown out.⁷

Increased supplies made for better living, better defenses, and for a decided lessening of the tension that marked the first month of operation. Each newly-arrived unit brought with it an adequate supply of necessities, and by the time the first Army ground unit arrived, on 13 October, the stockpile had increased to such an extent that it was possible to subsist the entire 164th Infantry for one month without depriving other units.⁸

The only path by which large numbers of Japanese could move against the western, or left, flank was blocked as long as Marine forces controlled the Matanikau river-mouth crossing; the passage of heavy equipment by any other crossing was out of the question. After the manning of defensive positions installed immediately after the action of 8 and 9 October, only enemy medium artillery (at least four 150mm howitzers were on the island) could place fires within the perimeter.

The enemy, in turn, was carrying out a program of development comparable to our own, although in doing so he was operating under constantly increasing difficulties. The increase in American air power, and the increased activity and success of Admiral Hal-

⁶ Each R4D could carry sufficient gasoline to keep 12 F4F fighter planes in the air for one hour.

⁷ *Final Report*, Phase V, Annex T, p. 9.

⁸ *Final Report*, Phase V, Medical Annex. The Medical Annex to the *Final Report* says that a three meal per day schedule resulted from this betterment of supply. This is emphatically denied by every rifle battalion officer queried and it seems likely that only within the sickbays and hospitals were three meals served.

sey's surface forces, had put a definite and unmistakable end to the free and undisputed program of supply and reinforcement that the Japanese had been able to carry out during August and part of September. The fact that he had to utilize destroyers for night landings may have been due to a lack of landing craft suitable for quick passage from staging areas to the islands⁹ but it seems more logical to assume that he had found that small fast combatant ships could operate in waters that were to a great extent denied to larger craft which demanded escort.

Following the defeat he had suffered during the operation of 8 October, the enemy abandoned for the time being his idea of holding the territory adjacent to the Matanikau. There was no sign of activity in the immediate vicinity of the river itself, and patrols sent out from the newly established positions met no opposition in their explorations of the ridges and ravines lying immediately to the west. These signs indicated that he had shifted his center of operation to Kokumbona or beyond.¹⁰

One of the missions of the enemy task force that was turned back during the Battle of Cape Esperance, described above, had been to bombard the airfield and cover the landing of reinforcements from the tenders *Chitose* and *Nisshin* and several destroyers at Tassafaronga, well to the west of Kokumbona. These ships carried 728 men, four 150 howitzers, two field pieces, an antiaircraft gun, radio equipment, and ammunition. Although they were sighted by the American task force, they were not fired on, and they landed the men and equipment.¹¹

The respite gained at the Battle of Cape

⁹ This condition is mentioned in *Campaigns of the Pacific War*, USSBS.

¹⁰ Marine Corps activity in the Matanikau sector, however, was causing alarm to the enemy:

"Japanese commanders were greatly alarmed with American activities along the Matanikau and with the possibility of landings along the coast to cut their communication lines. Repeated requests were made by Major General Kawaguchi to have all units alerted for such landings."

USAFISPA Report, p. 12.

¹¹ *Robinson ms.*

Esperance was a short one. On 12 October the American positions were subjected to a two-hour air attack by four waves of enemy bombers under fighter escort.¹² At sunset the next day, a heavy bombardment of the perimeter and the airfield was begun by land-based artillery situated far up the coast. The effect of the bombardment was to deny the use of the airfield for the time being, and all air activity during that period was carried out from the newly completed fighter strip.

Later the same night, a strong attack was made upon the American positions. The battleship *Kongo* and *Haruna*, screened by light cruiser *Isuzu* and eight destroyers, rained a continuous fire upon the airfield and the fighter strip for a period of 80 minutes.¹³ Flares from observation and spotting planes illuminated the area, and the fire was accu-

¹² *Final Report*, Phase V, p. 16.

¹³ *Robinson ms.*, p. 6



CAPT J. J. FOSS, of VMF-121, received the Medal of Honor for outstanding heroism as a fighter pilot during the Guadalcanal campaign.



RD 6172

THE OPERATION BOGGED DOWN, as shown in this overprint, and both the 1st Raider Battalion and the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines, found themselves immobilized by the Japanese.

rate and heavily damaging. The scout-bomber aircraft suffered heavily, and the close of the action found only one SBD in operating condition. Forty-one dead were suffered, with many wounded.¹⁴

If there had been any doubt that the intercepted first force and the successful operation of the second and larger force betokened an impending all-out attack, those doubts were removed when, on the next day, a heavily escorted convoy was sighted heading toward Guadalcanal. This was attacked by all aircraft still operational, and hits were scored on two large transports. Early on the morning of the 14th, six ships were seen to be disembarking troops and unloading supplies at Tassafaronga and were immediately brought under air attack. Two of the ships made shore, burning, while a third was sunk. The steep-to in that portion of the shore line is close inshore, and when the ships settled, after repeated attacks, the bows were almost over dry land. All personnel (c.4000) landed and 80% of the cargo was put ashore¹⁵. The three remaining transports stood out to sea, where they were subjected to still other

attacks—this time by Army B-17's. One of them received a hit and began burning.

The Japanese convoy consisted of the following ships, under escort by 8th Fleet Units *Sasago Maru*, *Nankai Maru*, *Sado Maru*, *Sakido Maru*, *Kyushu Maru*, and *Azumasen Maru*. The following units were embarked at Rabaul early in October—the exact date has not been determined: 38th Field Antiaircraft Battalion, 4th Heavy Field Artillery Regiment, 7th Heavy Field Artillery Regiment, 6th Independent Rapid Fire Gun Battalion, one company of the Independent Mortar Regiment, 76th L/C Hospital, 230th Infantry Regiment Headquarters, including sundry attached units, two battalions of the 230th Infantry Regiment, and replacements—a total of about 4500 men. The cruiser escort—Crudiv 6—was damaged in the naval engagement off Cape Esperance on 12 October, but all troop ships and supply ships got through to Tassafaronga on 13-14 October. *Kyushu*, *Azumasen*, and *Sasago* were sunk by planes from Henderson Field, but not before having discharged all personnel and most of the cargo. *Sado*, *Nankai*, and *Sakito* discharged passengers and cargo and escaped. Beached

¹⁴ *Final Report*, Phase V, p. 16.

¹⁵ *Rabaul*, USSBS, p. 44.

¹⁶ *USAFISPA Report*, p. 15.



WITH BOW OVER DRY LAND, this Japanese transport constitutes a testimonial to dive-bombing attacks by the 1st Marine Air Wing on 14 October, when she was caught unloading enemy reinforcements at Tassafaronga.

cargo was badly damaged by the attack which crippled the three ships.¹⁶

From the size of the forces involved and the way in which the different attacks were coordinated,¹⁷ it seemed apparent that an attack of impressive proportions and more than the usual degree of complexity was about to be delivered.

Once again, however, there began to be a lowering of morale among the troops within the perimeter. The arrival of a complete regimental combat team of Army troops—the 164th Infantry, Americal Division¹⁸—plus the assurance that still further reinforcements would be on the way soon, and the constant and demonstrable improvement in the supply situation were not sufficient to offset the effects of two months of almost constant combat of one or another degree of intensity. Increasing numbers of men were reporting to sickbay with benign tertian malaria, which removed them from combat as completely as though they had been battle casualties,¹⁹ and a large number who did not turn in were so reduced in vitality and efficiency as to be of limited usefulness.

ACTION AT GURABUSU AND KOILOTUMARIA

It will be realized that Tulagi, after the first three days of hard-fought action, had remained under the command of Brigadier General Rupertus and had become something between a rest camp and a point of departure for patrols on the island of Florida. It became likewise a center for seaplane and motor torpedo boat activity, sheltering as it did the best harbor in the vicinity. Supplies were landed there often in preference to the unprotected beaches on Guadalcanal and were subsequently transferred by barge and by YP boat to the larger island.

¹⁷ For example, the neutralization of the airfield at sundown so that American planes would not be able to interfere with the approach and operation of the bombardment force which struck later the same night.

¹⁸ Arrived 13 October, with the 1st Marine Air Wing and a Marine casual detachment of 300 men. Operation Plan A21 of TF62. 7 October 1942.

¹⁹ *Final Report*, Phase V, Annex T.



NATIVE HELP PAID OFF at Koilotumaria. In this picture, Australian Maj J. W. Mather who served side by side with Marines throughout the campaign, is shown counting out shillings to a native of the type which rendered such loyal assistance to U.S. forces.

Early in October there began to be reports²⁰ that the enemy was building up a concentration of forces in the neighborhood of Gurabusu and Koilotumaria, two native villages lying between Aola and the Lunga, some 25 miles east of the perimeter. This force formed a potential threat against the eastern sector, and it was decided to attack it with a force of approximately battalion strength from the Tulagi garrison.

Plans called for a landing in the darkness, immediately before dawn, followed by an inland movement and separate attacks against Gurabusu and Koilotumaria from the southeast. Captain Clemens, operating with his loyal native scouts in the area, was to guide the landing craft on by lights placed on the beach.

The group chosen for the task consisted of Companies A, B, and C of the 1st Battalion, 2d Marines, under Lieutenant Colonel Robert E. Hill. Movement from Tulagi was to be by Higgins boats, towed in groups of four by YP boats. Target date was 9 October.

The party left Tulagi at 1540 in eight craft. One group completed the run without inci-

²⁰ Notably that embodied in a fine narrative submitted by PlSgt Francis C. Pettus, of the 1st Raider Battalion. Pettus led a seven man patrol through the area early in the month. See *A Four Day Patrol*, Guadalcanal Doc 3GG, Marine Corps records-

dent, but the other met with misfortune in the shape of the loss of one of the landing craft. Foundering when the bow assembly pulled loose while it was under tow, the craft was lost, taking with it one officer, 14 enlisted Marines, and three Navy enlisted. Search for survivors delayed the landing of the group for several hours, and necessitated a change in plans.²¹

As the movement toward the beach was being completed, Hill looked in vain for signs of the lights Clemens had agreed to show. They did not appear, and the craft made their way ashore unassisted. The men disembarked, and at that moment Clemens arrived, with news of the number and dispositions of the enemy, and what appeared to be an unbelievably factual count of the weapons that Hill would run up against in the course of the action.

Hill, somewhat inclined to skepticism in the face of such meticulously detailed information, asked Clemens how he arrived at his estimate. Clemens replied that it was not an estimate at all—it was an actual count. When the Japanese had come ashore they had been offered assistance by a group of natives who happened to be nearby—and who happened to be Clemens' scouts. The enemy, pleased beyond words at the friendly offer, accepted, and put the natives to work unloading their equipment. As each piece was taken ashore, a tally was kept, and the final figures were given to Clemens. It bears mention parenthetically that the information he gave was exactly correct.²²

Due to the fact that the foundering of one of the landing craft had delayed approximately one half of the force, the assaults were not launched simultaneously, as had been planned. In spite of this, however, in each case they were successful.

At Koilotumaria, which was attacked at 1600 on the 10th, there was no opposition, only one enemy officer being met and killed. Unoccupied earthworks designed to be manned by perhaps 200 enemy were discovered, however. The one officer who was encountered

succeeded in wounding one of the Marine officers and killing an enlisted man before being killed himself.

At Gurabusu, which was attacked at noon on the same day, opposition was met, and about 30 enemy were killed at a loss to the attacking force of one officer killed and one slightly wounded. A large amount of material in the form of general supplies and radio equipment was found and destroyed at this village, and there was evidence that the enemy force had made its way to the interior.²³

THE ATTACK OF 21–28 OCTOBER

The enemy showed no signs of slackening the force or frequency of his air and surface attacks. The perimeter was shelled repeatedly, and air raids continued, while the volume and accuracy of artillery fire from the vicinity of Kokumbona increased steadily, indicating clearly that heavy, long-range weapons had been brought ashore. Five-inch guns of the 3d Defense Battalion were used as counterbattery weapons and succeeded in silencing several of the enemy guns, which were thought to be 150mm pieces.²⁴

The signs of an impending attack were unmistakable, and negative information gathered from the raid on Gurabusu and Koilotumaria indicated that it would come from the west. General Vandegrift was strengthened in his belief by the fact that patrol activities carried out along the upper Lunga, traditionally an avenue of egress from the interior, had seen no signs of enemy forces in that area. Small bands of survivors of previous actions were met and killed, but there was nothing indicative of forces preparing for attack.

Native sources, also, seemed to confirm that whatever the situation might be elsewhere, to the east and to the south there was no immediate danger. In this matter, it is

²¹ At this time a Japanese coastwatcher from the 3d Kure Special Naval Landing Force, active east of the perimeter, saw and reported Hill's landing. Marine Corps records, Guadalcanal Document 3-C.

²² *Final Report*, Phase V, p. 21.

²³ *The Island*, Merrillat, pp. 131-133.

²⁴ Interview, LtCol Hill, 20 January 1949.



"PISTOL PETE"!—The perimeter was shelled with increasing intensity by such Japanese medium artillery as this captured 150mm howitzer. Actually no single weapon could be identified as the "Pistol Pete" which Marines came to resent.

of interest to include a report made verbally by Saku, a native constable, to Captain Clemens, who translated it. The men mentioned in it were coastwatchers, and Sunahavi and Kiarokiki are native areas lying inland, south and southwest of the Lunga plains:

Report of Constable Saku, on return from patrol from Tangarare to Gold Ridge

On the third of October, after Mr. Rhoades and Mr. Schroder were picked up by the *Ramada* (a small launch owned by the British), I had had no instructions so I came to Kosumba, and then up to the headwaters of the Betikama, which are about a mile from there. I left Tangarare on the fifth.

I came along the trail which leaves the Betikama above Matanikao and cuts across to the Belaha River and thence to Kiarokiki. I saw no enemy or their tracks on this part of my journey. I slept in the bush by the Betikama, and reached Sunahavi the next evening. All the villagers of Kiarokiki have gone to Sunahavi.

Tracks were reported on the northern side of the Betikama, between that and the track to Tapinanja. I also got reports from the local natives that they had seen enemy behind Mambulo. The enemy party of some two hundred came up the Tenaru River track about two weeks ago. Then they split into two sections. One of these followed the Belaha River, and finding no food, cut across it and came on to the Betikama. We followed their tracks down a good way and there we decided to go back, in case the enemy also returned. They have not come back and probably have gone on down the Matanikao.

The remainder, a party of about eighty, remained in the vicinity of the Belaha River, eating and finally finishing the garden produce of the locals.

On the fifth of October, I was with Torovua of Sunahavi, and on our patrol we saw a party of ten enemy by the Belaha River.

They had piled arms on a rock and were busy getting wild nuts to eat. We cut across the river and took their rifles and hid. When they returned we saw that they were not armed and we closed in on them. They picked up stones to defend themselves, and as we did not want to give things away we finished them off with axes and spears. They were weak from hunger.

They had no rank badges on them.

On the sixth of October we looked for the rest of them. We saw nine more of them, again by the river. They again left their rifles and we dealt with them in the same manner. We came back and bivouacked by the river. We saw some enemy tracks in the morning, and heard a shot. I sent two boys on and they saw a party of twelve, all of whom had rifles. My two boys came back and reported to me. We then went down, twelve of us. We went and hid and surprised them at close range. They tried to shoot us but we caught hold of them and killed them. They all shouted for their friends to come and help them and they must have heard, for we found that the rest of the party, possibly fifty, had run away. We killed another Jap, making a total of 32. We picked up all the rifles of those who had run away and with the rifles of the first three parties, we had 100 rifles.

We made a hidden dump of all the rifles. We also found a small machine gun, and later another. We also found the parts of two more thrown into the river. We also found several mortars, and many hand grenades, which we left as we did not know whether they were armed or not. They had no supplies of food or packs. In their bivouac area we found many who had died from hunger, and they had also buried a large number. I saw their graves myself, which were very shallow. They had placed their flags on some of them.

There are also many dead aviators and aircraft parts in the scrub of that area.







The party who came with me to kill the Japs was led by Torovua, Nene, Sumba, Tanisi, and Nosi, all from Sunahavi.²⁵

MATANIKAU PHASE

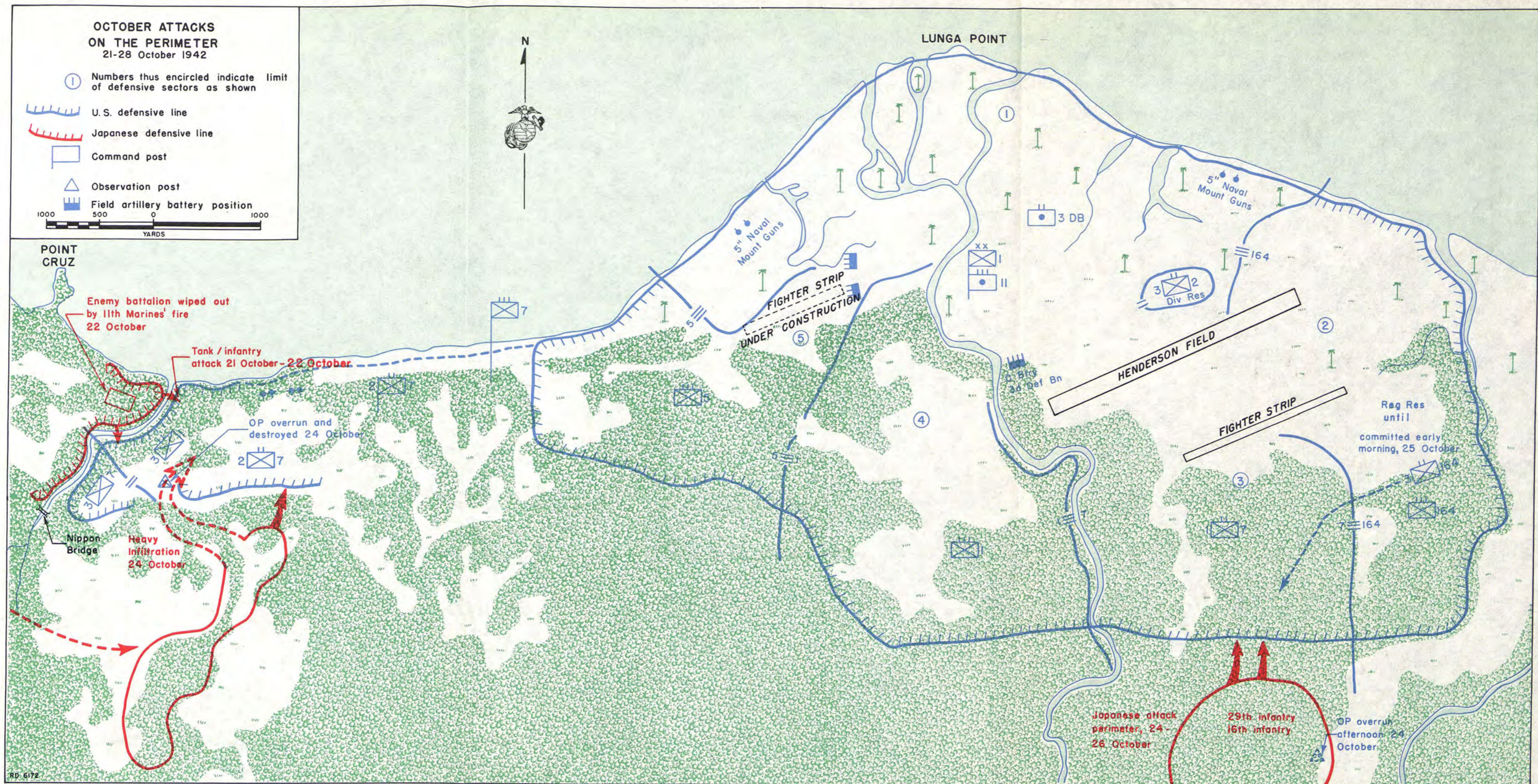
During the period of 21-28 October the enemy carried out his most sustained attack against the American forces. The operation began, as had been expected, with an increase of pressure on the western defensive sectors.

²⁵ *Patrol Reports*, Guadalcanal Document I-TTT, enclosure O, MCR.

**OCTOBER ATTACKS
ON THE PERIMETER**
21-28 October 1942

-  Numbers thus encircled indicate limit of defensive sectors as shown
-  U.S. defensive line
-  Japanese defensive line
-  Command post
-  Observation post
-  Field artillery battery position

1000 500 0 1000
YARDS



the newly established Matanikau horseshoe defense. On 19-20 October, the 3d Battalion, 1st Marines, in position at the mouth of the river, noticed considerable activity in the area immediately adjacent to the west bank of the river, and mortar and artillery fire began to fall upon its positions.

Late in the afternoon of the 21st, intense artillery fire began to fall, and the battalion experienced casualties, especially in that part of the sector commanding the crossing, manned by I Company. Immediately following this barrage, which lasted but a short time, a strong combat patrol, accompanied by nine tanks, attempted to force a crossing. This attempt was broken up without difficulty and driven back, with a loss to the enemy of one tank. He thereupon subsided and devoted the next day to a renewal of his artillery and mortar fire upon the same positions. The day's bombardment cost the battalion six dead and 25 wounded.²⁶

²⁶ *Final Report*, Phase V, p. 21.

The following day was quiet until 1800, when a strong concentration of fire from mortars and artillery fell once more upon the position of the 3d Battalion and upon areas lying between it and the perimeter, along the coastal track. Once more, also, barrage was the forerunner of an attack.

Just after dark there was a sudden cessation of fire, followed at once by a sortie of medium tanks²⁷ which in turn was followed closely by infantry in a mass onslaught.

Automatic weapons and antitank guns, emplaced and sighted in on what was known to be the only route of advance, were brought to bear on the tanks and turned back the assault. Mortar fire from the 81mm weapons of the 3d Battalion, 1st Marines, and 3d Battalion, 7th Marines, was laid down on the far bank of the river and laddered to 250

²⁷ The *Final Action Report* calls them 18-ton medium tanks, while the Intelligence Annex to the same document refers to them as 18-ton light tanks and describes them as extremely vulnerable.



JAPANESE MEDIUM TANKS attempted a sortie across the mouth of the Matanikau only to be destroyed by Marine antitank guns and 75mm half-tracks.

yards inland.²⁸ Artillery fire from the 11th Marines, a prearranged concentration of ten batteries, was placed along the road between the river and the base of Point Cruz.²⁹ These fires were maintained during the entire course of the attack, and were repeated at irregular intervals throughout the night.³⁰

One lone Japanese tank succeeded in reaching the east bank of the river. It likewise succeeded in overrunning a machine gun emplacement and several foxholes before being finally put out of action by a grenade placed in the track by the occupant of one of the overrun foxholes. Out of control, it was chased into the surf by a half-track 75mm gun and there destroyed.³¹

The end of the attack came at 2200, with the exception of an abortive attempt on the part of a small enemy force to make its way across the deep and stagnant lagoon about 800 yards from the mouth. Nine hostile tanks remained on the scene, destroyed by fire from the emplacements on the east bank. It was several days before conditions warranted the sending out of patrols to the base of Point Cruz, and it was not until the reports from the patrols came in that the entire tale could be reconstructed.

The tale was a simple one. The enemy force attempting the crossing had been virtually annihilated. Massed fire from the 11th Marines apparently had boxed in the entire force as it was approaching the river, while the enemy in the immediate vicinity of the left bank had been caught by 81mm mortar fire from 3d Battalion, 1st Marines, and 3d Battalion, 7th Marines. An actual count could not be made on the spot, but the number of dead reached several hundred. The remains of three more tanks were found where they too had been trapped and destroyed by the artillery barrage.

The artillery aspects of the repulse of the river mouth attack merit discussion. At the time, 12 batteries were in position within the

perimeter, all but one on the periphery of the airfield, and the latter in position just west of the Lunga, with the mission of being available to deliver certain predetermined concentrations along the Matanikau. The remaining batteries were so situated as to be able to cover given areas adjacent to the perimeter.

The knowledge of the impending attacks in the latter part of the month of October had presented a problem to Brigadier General Pedro A. del Valle, then commanding the 11th Marines. It was felt that the eastern sector, along the Tenaru, was not seriously threatened, but there was no such definite assurance in regard to either the Matanikau or the southern areas. Therefore, when the barrage of 23 October began to fall on the sector of 3d Battalion, 1st Marines, and when it became obvious that this was the preface to an assault upon the crossing, General del Valle was faced with the unpleasant necessity of deciding whether to displace the mass of the artillery to a position whence it would be possible to interdict that crossing or to retain in place a part of his strength to guard against a possible surprise from the south.

Once the decision was made, it became necessary to displace nine batteries of 75mm and 105mm guns across the Lunga. The river was in spate from rains in the foothills the previ-



SCIENTIFIC EXTERMINATION was the artillerymen's objective. This 155 mm howitzer is being fired at Japanese targets west of the Matanikau by Marines of the 4th Battalion, 11th Marines.

²⁸ *Final Report*, Phase V, p. 22.

²⁹ Letter, Lieutenant Colonel William R. Williams to Commandant, Marine Corps.

³⁰ *Final Report*, Phase V, p. 22.

³¹ *The Island*, p. 164.

ous day, and the only bridge was one of logs that was not thought to be too trustworthy. Amphibian tractors, therefore, were stationed on either bank of the Lunga to assist in moving the weapons and the necessary ammunition across, and the guns went into position areas south of Kukum.³²

Studies of the terrain had shown that the coastal track lay rather close to the beach beyond the Matanikau, and that between the track and the low ridges that impinge upon the plain there was an area, restricted in extent, where it would be necessary for any assault force to assemble preparatory to following the tank attack. The range to this area was known, and the area itself divided into strips parallel to the line of fire from the emplaced batteries. Each battery was assigned one strip, which it could cover merely by increasing or decreasing ("laddering") its range. The estimate of the situation proved to be correct, and the result was the complete and scientific extermination of an enemy force.

All the activity of the night had centered about the river mouth, while the sector occupied by the adjacent battalion, the 3d Battalion, 7th Marines,³³ had been perfectly quiet. No attempt had been made to cross by the Nippon Bridge for a flanking movement.

Daybreak of the 24th, however, brought evidence that the operation was not yet ended, for as soon as it was possible to see, observers for the 3d Battalion, 7th Marines discerned a strong enemy force crossing a ridge to the left rear of their position and disappearing into a ravine.³⁴ Artillery fire and air strikes were called upon the area, but no confidence of the success of either measure was felt, considering the character of the terrain which the enemy had entered.

The seriousness of the situation, which lay in the fact that the enemy had placed a strong

group in position for an attack upon the rear of the horseshoe defensive position, was mitigated to some extent by the fact that the refused left flank could be strengthened almost at once, thanks to a fortuitous happening of the day before. On that day, the 7th Marines—less the 3d Battalion which was in position along the Matanikau—had "singled up" its lines,³⁵ by turning over its regimental defensive sector east of the Lunga to its 1st Battalion³⁶ (see below for the activity of this battalion). The balance of this regiment, consisting of the 2d Battalion and Regimental Headquarters, set out for the Matanikau for the purpose of relieving the 3d Battalion, 1st Marines.

The mission of the relieving force was changed at once as a result of the news of the presence of the menacing enemy force. Instead of going into position at the mouth of the river, the battalion took up positions along the sharp ridge on the left flank of the 3d Battalion, 7th Marines, establishing visual contact with that unit on the right and stopping short of contact with the 5th Marines.

Such was the length of the sector so held that the lines were tenuous in the extreme, but, operating in favor of the defense, was the fact that the ridges along which the line ran were high and with precipitous sides. Especially was this true toward the southward, for the southern slopes were almost cliff-like in their steepness, and it was thought that any attack from the ravines below could only be delivered with its impetus greatly reduced.

THE INLAND PHASE—24-26 OCTOBER

The decision to thin the lines of the 7th Marines had been reached after some deliberation. Extensive patrolling of the area

³² This odd, but appropriate, use in mutation of a technical nautical term occurs twice in the narrative portion of General Vandegrift's *Final Action Report*. It describes accurately the attenuation of the lines which resulted when one battalion was withdrawn and the lines of another were spread out over a two-battalion front.

³³ *Summary of Operations, 1st Battalion, 7th Marines. Enclosure C, p. 1.*

³⁴ Details of the artillery phase described here were obtained from General del Valle during interviews held in the fall of 1947.

³⁵ *Final Report, Phase V, p. 22.*

³⁶ *Final Report, Phase V, p. 22.* This column was seen likewise by an observation patrol from the 11th Marines operating on the northwestern slope of Mt. Austen.

south of the perimeter had been carried out by Marines and by details of native scouts, who had gone far up the Lunga. This valley was known to be a path of travel between the plains and the foothills. No evidence was found of Japanese activity, and this negative information was a deciding factor in the decision to weaken one sector for the strengthening of another.

By 24th October, however, the second day after the 7th Marines' lines had been attenuated, two disturbing bits of information were gathered with regard to the southern areas.³⁷ An observer reported that he had seen what appeared to be a Japanese officer studying the airfield through field glasses from Edson's Ridge, scene of the great September battle, while a second man, member of a patrol operating up the Lunga, reported that he had seen the smoke from many small fires up the valley.

As if to confirm the suspicion which arose immediately these data were made known, there was a burst of activity in the vicinity of an outpost stationed 3,000 yards from the perimeter, southeast of the Ridge.³⁸ The position, on top a ridge, was by-passed by the enemy, and all but one of the 46 men who manned it scattered, returning to the perimeter. The one man who remained returned two weeks later after having spent the interim in the jungle. This activity, which took place at about 2130, was followed at 0030 by a strong attack against the line held by the 1st Battalion, 7th Marines. The assault struck on a narrow front against the left center of the sector. (This sector extended from Edson's Ridge eastward to the Tenaru, through lowland jungle country.)

Artillery concentrations were immediately placed in front of the threatened sector, and the reserve battalion of the 164th Regiment (3d Battalion, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Robert K. Hall), which held the sec-

³⁷ *Final Report*, Phase V, p. 23.

³⁸ *Summary of Operations*, 1st Battalion, 7th Marines, enclosure C, p. 1.

Final Report, Phase V, p. 24. The battalion report and the *Final Report* differ by one-half hour as to the time of the opening of the action.



SGT JOHN BASILONE, subsequently killed in action on Iwo Jima, won the Medal of Honor for heroic performance as a machine gunner in the defense of Henderson Field during the October battles.

tor to the left of the threatened point, was moved in behind the 1st Battalion, 7th Marines, in a difficult night movement during heavy rain. By 0330 the battalion had completed its move to the rear of the threatened sector.³⁹

Fire from mortars was used to supplement that from artillery and from automatic weapons. Penetrations of the lines occurred at several scattered points, but none involved groups large enough to be dangerous.⁴⁰

³⁹ *Final Report*, Phase V, p. 24.

⁴⁰ According to Colonel Puller's report (*Summary of Operations*) a salient was driven into the lines at 0500, but was wiped out during the day.

The action continued until 0700 on the 25th. By this time the situation was under control, and it was possible to see that heavy casualties had been inflicted upon the enemy, especially around the wire which protected the front. Mopping-up operations began immediately, and those enemy groups which had succeeded in penetrating the defenses were wiped out. The fact that the reserve battalion of the 164th had been committed piecemeal as each small group arrived in the sector of the 1st Battalion, 7th Marines meant that by conclusion of the defensive phase of the action, there was a complete intermingling of forces, and in order to regain something like order and unity, the day was spent in readjusting the lines.

The heavy rains of the preceding night, which had impeded the movement of the supporting battalion (and also of the enemy), had made the newly constructed, still unmatted fighter strip west of the main airfield and south of Kukum impossible of use for

the time being. The enemy, obviously in close touch with his supporting airfields to the northwest, apparently relayed this news back, for, beginning early in the morning, and continuing well through the day, there was an unremitting series of air attacks. Some damage was suffered, but when the surface of the field dried sufficiently⁴¹ to allow planes to take off, the effect of the air strikes lessened at once. As fighter planes were able to take to the air, the enemy began to suffer losses in addition to those incurred by antiaircraft fire.

The score of enemy planes for the day was 27, of which five were accounted for by anti-aircraft fire from the weapons of the 3d Defense Battalion. The rest were brought down by fighter planes from Henderson Field

⁴¹ The coral content of the soil and the subsoil gave a phenomally quick drying. It was not unusual for dust to be flying from bare earth exposed to the sun within an hour after the cessation of a torrential rain.



UNREMITTING JAPANESE AIR ATTACKS pounded Henderson Field on 24-25 October while U.S. aircraft were grounded by heavy rains which bogged down the airstrip. This shows a hit by a 500-pound bomb.

and from Fighter Strip #1. The total included 17 Zeros and five undescribed bombers. American losses were in materiel only — two F4F-4's and one TBF. All personnel of the American planes was saved.⁴²

In the meanwhile, enemy surface craft, in the shape of three large destroyers,⁴³ *Akatsuki*, *Ikazuchi*, and *Shiratsuyo*, had appeared in the area between Tulagi and Guadalcanal and had attacked and driven out of the vicinity two World War I flush-decked American destroyer transports (*Trevor* and *Zane*). These ships, greatly out-gunned and out-ranged, were forced to retire, whereupon the enemy craft fired upon and sank the *Seminole*, a fleet tug which had been performing valuable work in transporting gasoline, weapons, and ammunition from Tulagi to Guadalcanal. At the time of sinking, she was bringing a part of Battery I, 10th Marines, to Guadalcanal. Five casualties were incurred. The 5-inch shore batteries of the 3d Defense Battalion, emplaced immediately east and west of Lunga Point, engaged the enemy craft and scored three hits on one of them.⁴⁴ This opposition, together with the attacks that began to be launched by the now active fighter planes, forced the enemy to retire.⁴⁵

During the night of 25-26 October, attacks against the sector held by the 1st Battalion, 7th Marines, and the 3d Battalion, 164th Infantry, were renewed. A series of assaults against the position, which had been strengthened and consolidated during the day, were thrown back with what was known at the time to be heavy loss to the enemy, although the actual size of that loss was underestimated at first by the commander of 1st

⁴² *Final Report*, Phase V, p. 25, and Annex Q.

⁴³ The enemy craft had just landed troops, according to *Robinson ms*, p. 6. They were part of Admiral Mikawa's notorious "Tokyo Express" that operated so efficiently during almost the entire period of the campaign.

⁴⁴ *Final Report*, Phase V, p. 25.

⁴⁵ The Division Commander's Final Action Report is unstinting of praise of the services rendered by the badly hindered air units on the island: "The day, which began so badly for us, ended in success due to the skill and audacity of our air force."

Battalion, 7th Marines. According to enemy records, one regiment alone, the 29th Infantry, suffered the loss of one entire battalion—its total casualties amounted to 1050. Two other regiments—16th and 230th—and part of the Kawaguchi Brigade were involved in the attack and suffered likewise.⁴⁶

From what little could be surmised of the enemy's plan and his manner of executing it, nothing could be discerned of a nature to increase the respect of Marines for Japanese intelligence. There was no attempt, apparently, to probe for weak spots in the perimeter defenses, for all attacks had been hammered home at approximately the same point. All were stopped with appalling loss to the enemy, inflicted by fire from automatic weapons and by artillery concentrations immediately in front of the Marine and Army positions. A Japanese sergeant who had taken part in the attacks and who was captured and questioned, was asked why it was that the assaults were repeatedly hammered against defenses that had already proved to be too strong for breaching. His reply contained much information by implication of the attitude of the men who were then in charge of enemy operations. He said that since the plan for the attack had been worked out carefully, it had to be followed, and that no one would dare to improvise.

While the attacks against Sector 3 were going on, the expected attack against the inland extension of the Matanikau sector developed. It will be remembered that an attenuated line had been thrown along the ridge line east of the Nippon Bridge crossing. This position fronted on a deep, long valley that ran parallel to the coast from the Matanikau River to an area southwest of the perimeter. It was steep and heavily wooded, whereas the ridge was bare and exposed. The action that was fought there was a bitter one, and merited a more detailed treatment than was afforded it in reports.

The ridge line was formed by two hills whose long axis ran in a generally east-west direction. The easterly of the two hills was

⁴⁶ *The Marines' War*. Fletcher Pratt, p. 92.



ANTI-AIRCRAFT GUNNERS of the 3d Defense Battalion provided the sole air defense for Henderson Field during the critical hours while U.S. airplanes were grounded.

slightly higher than the other, with which it was connected by a shallow saddle. A third hill, lower than either of the others, abutted the eastern extremity of the saddle, with its long axis at right angles to that of the ridge.

Three companies went into position at 1830, 24 October, along the ridge line, Company F on the left (east) flank, Company G across the saddle, and Company E along the eastern extremity of the western hill. Between the right flank elements of Company E and the left flank elements of the 3d Battalion, 7th Marines, in position along the Matanikau, there was a gap of about 400 yards. Visual contact was possible, but the 2d Battalion could not close the gap without an extremely dangerous attenuation of its lines. The left flank of the 3d Battalion, 7th Ma-

rines, was extended 200 yards by two strong points, which went into position after dark. These points occupied different positions each night.⁴⁷

From the moment of its completion, the position was subjected to accurate, and apparently observed, artillery fire. Casualties were suffered during the daylight hours of 25 October. During the night of 24 October, at least one large infiltration of the line occurred when a large body of enemy came through the gap to the west of Company E, wiped out a mortar observation post, and, inexplicably, withdrew by the same route before morning. Other infiltrating parties succeeded in cutting communication between the

⁴⁷ Letter, Williams to CMC, 17 January 1949.



SGT MITCHELL PAIGE receives the Medal of Honor from Gen Vandegrift as a reward for outstanding heroism while manning a machine-gun of the 2d Battalion, 7th Marines.

mortar positions near the beach and the advance battalion command post.

This post was situated about five feet below the crest line of the higher hill and ten yards from the crest, near the abutment, of the third hill. During the daylight hours of 25 October the position was under constant fire. One platoon of Company F was withdrawn at evening and directed to make its way to the right of Company E and to endeavor to prevent further infiltration through the gap on the right flank.

Enemy forces could be heard in the gully below, and the volume of sound indicated that they were large. During the night, multi-colored flashlight signals could be seen, and from their appearance it seemed that the enemy was in movement to the eastward, toward the perimeter. During the night of 25 October also a number of snipers made their way to the tops of a large grove of rain forest trees immediately to the front of the eastern hill. Such was the height of these trees that men in them had a clear downward view of the crest line of the hill. Men in the fox-holes along the crest were completely exposed.

Three separate assaults were thrown at Company F, defending the left flank. At 2130

and again at 2300 there were strong enemy thrusts by a force estimated to be about one battalion strength. These were thrown back.

At 0300, however, the company position became untenable in the face of an overwhelming attack, and the men were killed or began making their way to the northwest, toward the beach. Company G, in the meanwhile, farther to the right and not under immediate attack, fought desperately to enfilade the attacking troops, but the enemy succeeded in clearing the top of the ridge in Company F sector, capturing three machine guns and putting about 150 men in position.⁴⁸






In the meanwhile, the command post nearby had no knowledge of the fact that a portion of the company had made its escape. In the early morning light, enemy could be seen a few yards off, and vapor from the barrels of their machine guns was clearly visible. It was decided to try to rush the position.

At this moment, Major Odell M. Conoley, the battalion executive, had only a small group of men for the task. Three enlisted communication personnel, several riflemen, and a few company runners were at the point, together with a cook and a few messmen who had brought food to the position the evening before. These men—a total of about seventeen all told—were formed into an assault force, and were supported in the rush by elements of the Headquarters and Service Company, 7th Marines, and one platoon from Company C, 5th Marines.

The extremely short range allowed the optimum use of grenades, with which the two machine guns were knocked out, and the element of surprise permitted the small force to clear the crest. In the meanwhile, the mortar crews to the northward, operating in accordance with instructions given prior to the disruption of communications, had laid a heavy fire in the gully and began shortening the range so that approach to the crest was denied from the southern slope of the hill.

⁴⁸ *Summary of Operations, 2d Battalion, 7th Marines, period 25-26 October 1942.* See also document entitled simply *Fourth Matanikan*, prepared by an unidentified unit of the 7th Marines. In Marine Corps Records.

CONOLEY'S ACTION 24-26 OCTOBER 1942

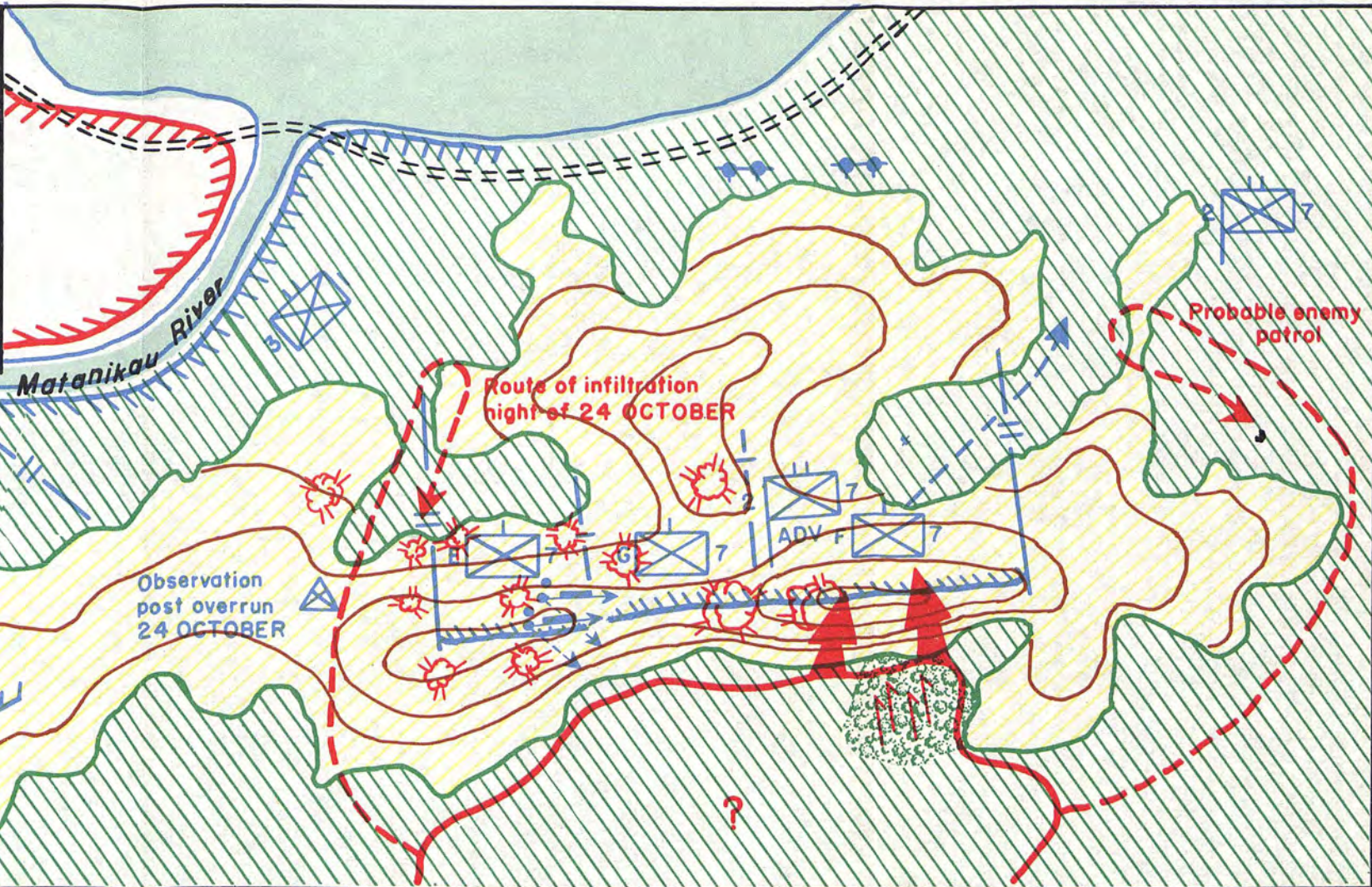
-  Enemy front line
-  Enemy artillery concentration
-  Marine observation unit
-  Command post
-  81mm mortar section



N



RD 6172



This fire also, apparently, disposed of the snipers located in the grove to the front.

The action had cost the battalion 30 dead and a number, unspecified in the *Final Report*, of wounded.⁴⁹

THE ENEMY SITUATION—21-28 OCTOBER

Activity on all parts of the perimeter died away with the failure of the Japanese attacks of the 25-26 October. There were fitful flare-ups before Sector 3, but these too died away within the next two days, and it became apparent that the enemy was withdrawing inland. It was possible to conduct reconnaissance in front of the sector and to appraise the damage inflicted upon the attackers. One thousand four hundred sixty-two dead were counted, and truckloads of materiel and weapons were found abandoned.

Documents subsequently found enable us to reconstruct with some degree of accuracy the plans which the enemy had made and his order of battle. It seems that instead of an uncoordinated series of attacks on separate days, a general attack upon the perimeter had been planned, and that this attack was looked upon as the culmination of a series of offensive moves.

The operation had been under the command of Lieutenant General Maruyama, commanding general of the 2d Division, and had been characterized, as is explained below, by hopelessly inaccurate intelligence data.

A provision contained in the enemy division order is included here because of the insight it gives to Japanese logistic planning and methods:

43. The division will take charge of the transportation of supplies from the landing point (between Tassafaronga and the Segilau River) to the ammunition dumps (upper Matanikau), and this will generally conform to the following methods:

1. To be carried by the arriving troops:
 - a. Each man will carry one shell besides his own equipment, ammunition, and ration.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ *Final Report*, Phase V, p. 25. Interview with Lieutenant Colonel Odell M. Conoley regarding details of operation of 2d Battalion, 7th Marines.

⁵⁰ *USAFISPA Report*, p. 22.

The failure of the enemy operation can be laid to faulty terrain intelligence, bad weather, and inaccurate estimates of the U. S. situation. In this regard the Japanese seem to have been slightly farther off than were the Americans, for immediately before the operation under discussion, it was possible for them to estimate the total American forces on the island as something slightly in excess of 10,000 troops.

In the matter of terrain their lack of understanding is difficult to explain. By 1 October there were in the enemy forces many men who had participated in the Battle of the Ridge and who subsequently had made their way to the west and the northwest over the broken terrain of the interior. A part of the plan for the attack of 22 October involved the cutting of a trail through the interior farther inland than the native trails in order to avoid observation by patrols and by native scouts. From the point of view of concealment, the plan worked out perfectly, for there is no evidence that the presence of several enemy regiments south of the airfield was suspected until shortly before the beginning of the attack on 24 October.

The time element, however, was hopelessly misapprehended. It had been planned that the route from the headwaters of the Mamara, a small stream to the west of Kokumbona, through the interior back of Mount Austen and thence to the upper Lunga Valley would be prepared by a small engineering party who would mark it out for the main body. The character of the terrain was such that the latter, setting out shortly after the departure of the survey party and carrying only five days' rations, found the tentative schedule of attack impossible of completion. Several delays in the timetable were authorized by the commanding officer, but it appears that communication difficulties prevented dissemination of the important information.

The first attack at the mouth of the Matanikau, for instance, was delivered one day early, although it is possible that this seemingly ill-timed assault was launched in the hope that it would siphon off some of the

troops on the perimeter,⁵¹ and the subsequent attack was delayed. The assault upon the ridge, which was to have been of a diversionary character and launched prior to the main action east of Edson's Ridge, in order to cause a movement of reserves to the supposedly threatened sector, actually was not initiated until after the issue had been decided in front of Sector 3 and after all chance of accomplishing its purpose had disappeared.

Perhaps no army in history has contained within its ranks as large a number of inveterate diarists as did the Japanese. It amazed the American forces that such material was carried by the enemy individual at all times, for it was seldom that the search of the dead after a battle or the ransacking of a bivouac area did not turn up innumerable examples of it.

Troop-movement and composition were discussed freely, and plans for forthcoming operations, as far as they were known to the diarists, likewise received full and critical treatment. The value of such items was recognized early in the campaign, and full advantage of the information gained was taken as soon as the captured material could be put into usable form by the language officers of the division.⁵²

It was from one such diary, found on the body of an enemy officer subsequent to the repulse of the late October attacks, that the following details of the movement and action

⁵¹ Comment, F. L. Wieseman.

⁵² Captured maps and documents were inspected by language officers at regimental command posts, and anything of obviously immediate significance was translated forthwith. Other items were sent to Division, where they were inspected more thoroughly. Every document, theoretically, found its way ultimately to Noumea and then to Pearl Harbor, where it was fully processed by the Joint Intelligence Center, Pacific Ocean Area, better known as JICPOA.

Enemy prisoners were put through a similar routine. Questioning at regiment command posts was confined to immediately important matters. At Division, the prisoners were interrogated thoroughly about local affairs. They were taken finally to rear areas — at first to New Zealand, later to New Caledonia.

of one regiment were secured. This regiment (the 29th Infantry) played an important role in the main attack, and the diarist's descriptions, while of necessity short, are remarkably graphic:

1. *The Mission:* The Regiment was to assault Mukade Hill (Edson's Ridge) with one blow and sweep all the artillery positions west of the airfield and near the coast, and one detachment would seize the bridge over the Lunga River. By dawn it would capture the enemy artillery positions on the right bank of the Lunga and prepare to attack Hiyo position from the rear. (This term probably refers to positions on western sector behind Kukum.)

2. The regiment advanced to complete the above mission, and because of the extremely confused terrain, an officer patrol was dispatched. However, it returned on the night of the 25th without being able to learn the enemy strength or position.

3. On the way, a heavy rain storm was encountered so that the unit's advance was greatly delayed although it still kept on the move.

4. On the 25th, about 2300, we finally had an encounter with the enemy. The Regiment was advancing with the 3d Battalion in the lead and the 1st Battalion on the right front, but as movements were not discernible, contact could not be maintained. The 2d Battalion was to be the reserve for the Infantry Group, but it followed directly behind the Regiment.

5. When the Unit encountered the enemy, the terrain and enemy situation were completely obscure, and it was necessary to advance along a road which had been made by the enemy. To make matters worse, the enemy had excellent detectors set up which discovered our movements and there was intense machine gun and mortar fire. Even though it was night, the enemy had good plots, and were able to inflict extremely heavy losses in this way.

6. However, the 3d Battalion commander, with strong determination, strove to break through. Each company, in accordance with its orders, began the assault, but because of the heavy concentration of mortar and machine gun fire, the break-through was delayed.

7. About that time, the Regimental Commander, with the 7th Company, which is the Company which guards the Regimental Color, entered the enemy position.

8. The Color entered the enemy position, but the 3d Battalion's assault made no progress. Finally the dawn broke and enemy fire became more and more intense.

9. The 3d Battalion was practically annihilated in this assault.

10. The 2d Battalion learned of the situation during the night, but because the enemy knew there was only the one road, dawn came without them finding any way of disposition.

11. Commander of the 2d Battalion, Lieutenant Colonel *Watanabe*, decided that it was not feasible to plan a day assault, and he carried out a reconnaissance of the enemy situation and terrain during the day for the night attack of the 26th which was to break through at a single blow.

12. According to the order of the Infantry Group Commander, in the attack on the night of the 26th, the 2d Battalion would be in front, the 16th Regiment on the right front, and the 1st Battalion on the middle front. Although it was planned to break through at one blow at 1900, this night attack did not succeed on any of the fronts. In this night attack the Commander of the Infantry Group, (who was) a general officer (T.N. — probably Major General *Nasu*, Yumio), Commander of the 16th Regiment (T.N. — Colonel *Hiroyasu*, Juro) *Watanabe* Battalion Commander, and First Lieutenant Ueno died honorable deaths in battle.

13. Because the losses of high staff officers and men were heavy, and enemy fire-power so intense, the attack was broken off for a while.

14. Since the Regiment did not know the whereabouts of the Color and Regimental Commander after their breakthrough, the Division, as also the Army, were most concerned, and the Regiment did its utmost in searching for the Color.

15. On both the night of the 26th and 27th, the Regiment sent out a searching party for the Color. The first night the Assistant Adjutant led five officers. The second night the Assistant Adjutant led ten officers and N.C.O.'s.

16. They searched continually for the location of the Color and Regimental Commander, until unwillingly they had to leave the front lines.

17. In round numbers, our losses at this *Mukade* Hill battle were:

Killed	-----	350
Wounded	-----	500
Missing	-----	200
		1050

18. Movements of the Regiment after this: They recovered their wounded and were ordered to take them back to the *Matanikau* River as quickly as possible.

It became clear after the end of the war that the great October enemy actions had been planned as a coordinated operation between Army and Navy forces. As we have seen, a total lack of appreciation of the terrain, with an attendant breakdown of communications, had prevented proper cooperation between even the various ground units. Forthright action by United States surface forces, as will be seen below, prevented unhampered assistance by enemy bombardment groups.



LTGEN HYAKUTAKE, from his headquarters at Rabaul, commanded the Japanese Seventeenth Army's all-out October effort to retake Guadalcanal.

Prior to the beginning of the attacks, however, there was a spirit of optimism current in the enemy upper echelons of command. Perhaps the highest expression of this optimism is contained implicitly in certain paragraphs of an enemy 2d Division order—YU Operation Order No. 174, dated 21 October 1942 and issued at a point about six miles south of the airfield. Pertinent extracts appear below:

(1) In case the enemy forwards a surrender, the following demands should be made as intentions of the Commander-in-Chief of the Japanese force:

a. The whole force will immediately stop fighting and disarm /i.e. — the American force/

b. The destruction of armament, ammunition, provisions, boats, and equipment, possessed by the enemy is prohibited.

* * * * *

(2) After the enemy commander has transacted

the terms of the first item, he shall be accompanied by a necessary number of side guards and interpreters, head toward the mouth of the *Matanikau* River by way of the coastal road, and agree to the terms of surrender to the commander of our force.⁵³



VANDEGRIFT'S OPPONENT, MajGen Maruyama, sent his 2d (Sendai) Division into their costly October attacks with specific instructions for handling the Marine commander when captured.

During the latter half of the month of October, two changes occurred in the South Pacific Area command. On 18 October, Ghormley was replaced as Commander, South Pacific Area by Vice Admiral William Halsey. On 28 October, the Marine Corps command echelon corresponding within the hierarchy to that of Turner as Commander of Task Force 62 was set up in Noumea when Major General Clayton B. Vogel opened his com-

⁵³ *Hyakutake Meets the Marines*, Captain William H. Whyte, Jr., p. 29.

mand post as Commanding General, First Marine Amphibious Corps. His command included all Marine Corps troops, save carrier-based Marine Air personnel, in Halsey's area. His organization, however, exercised no tactical control over the Guadalcanal operation, instead busying itself entirely with administrative matters.

THE BATTLE OF SANTA CRUZ⁵⁴

While the all-out Japanese effort of late October was taking place, American Naval forces operating east of the Guadalcanal area engaged numerically superior Japanese forces. The Battle of Santa Cruz, which took place on 25-26 October, was characterized by an increased enemy submarine activity, and by the fact that once more a major naval engagement was fought without the opposing surface forces becoming engaged as such.

Two American task forces were involved, each built around a carrier. One of these, with the *Enterprise* (Rear Admiral Kinkaid) as a nucleus, included also the battleship *South Dakota*, the heavy cruiser *Portland*, the anti-aircraft cruiser *San Juan*, and eight destroyers. The second task force was composed of the *Hornet* (Rear Admiral Murray), the heavy cruisers *Northampton* (Rear Admiral Good) and *Pensacola*, the anti-aircraft cruisers *San Diego* and *Juneau*, and six destroyers.

The enemy force confronting these two groups was numerically far superior to them. Commanded by Vice Admiral Nagumo, it included four carriers—*Junyo*, *Shokaku*, *Zuikaku*, and *Zuiho*; four battleships—*Kongo*, *Haruna*, *Hiei*, and *Kirishima*; eight cruisers, and at least 29 destroyers. It operated in three combat groups—Advance Force, Carrier Force, and Battleship Force.

The American forces had been ordered to skirt the north shore of the Santa Cruz Islands and to take station directly east of San Cristobal. While these orders were being fol-

⁵⁴ Details of the Battle of Santa Cruz are taken *in toto* from *Campaigns*, USSBS, pp. 119-124.



THE COMMANDANT INSPECTS. Third from left, LtGen Thomas Holcomb, seventeenth Commandant of the Marine Corps, looks over a captured Japanese despatch-case during his front-line inspection of Guadalcanal in October 1942.

lowed, both groups were under observation both by enemy submarines and by planes from the enemy 25th Air Flotilla, operating from the Shortland Islands and from Rabaul.

By dawn of 25 October, the American ships were on station, and the *Enterprise* launched an unsuccessful search flight. In spite of intensive search and patrolling, it was not until the morning of the 26th that the situation was developed and battle was joined. In the ensuing engagements the American

forces lost the *Hornet* to aircraft attack and the destroyer *Porter* to submarine attack. Seventy-four planes likewise were lost from all causes. Enemy losses included 100 planes and severe damage to *Shokaku*, *Zuiho*, and *Chikuma*, a heavy cruiser of Cruiser Division 8 and destroyer *Terutsuki*. Damage was likewise suffered by the *Enterprise*, *South Dakota*, *San Juan*, and the destroyer *Smith*, as well as by the enemy destroyers *Terutsuki* and *Akikaze*.



THE GUADALCANAL CAMPAIGN

CHAPTER VIII

Critical November

BY THE CLOSING days of October, when the third assault upon the perimeter had been thrown back with great loss to the enemy, American forces, steadily growing in numerical strength, began to operate more actively outside the perimeter.

THE AOLA BASE

Plans existed at this time for expansion, both to the east and to the west, of the territory under American control. The most important of these, perhaps, was that which contemplated the establishment of a second large airfield on the plains east of the perimeter. Initial plans had called for its construction inland from the native village of Volinavua, which lies somewhat to the west of Tetera and perhaps 15 miles by the coastal road to the east of the Lunga. The fields there are level, and with a minimum of work they could be made operable for any planes on the island. (It will be recalled that one of the earliest patrol actions of the campaign arose from the fact that a patrol was sent to guard a party surveying that very area.)

Upon the insistence of Admiral Turner, however, this plan was abandoned in favor of one which General Vandegrift and his Marine engineer advisers regarded as unsound. This project called for the building of a field at Aola, much farther to the east beyond Taivu, nearly fifty miles from the perimeter, and was not only opposed by technical men on the grounds of the evident unsuitability

of the terrain for airfield construction,¹ but by Vandegrift because of the dispersion of force required to maintain a little perimeter of this character in enemy country, and remote from the main body of our forces. Admiral Turner, however, had always inclined to the opinion that the forces of the 1st Marine Division should be dispersed along the coast "mopping up", as he put it, the "remaining Japanese" (who at this moment had reached peak strength for the campaign).

Troops were designated to occupy the area, therefore, and by the beginning of November the movement toward it had begun. The 1st Battalion, 147th Infantry, was ordered forward from Tonga, where it had been stationed for several months, to act as security for the remainder of the force. This consisted of a Naval Construction Battalion and the 5th Defense Battalion. The landing was scheduled for the night of 3 November.

¹ Engineer reconnaissance patrols from the 1st Marine Division had gone over the ground thoroughly and returned with emphatic negative recommendations. In addition to this, Mather and Clemens, British District officers who had served on Guadalcanal, had stated that any such construction project at Aola would be a flat impossibility. Commander Naval Activities Cactus-Ringbolt Area (Guadalcanal-Tulagi) advised CTF62 late in October—date of document is uncertain, but it refers to a message sent from same source on 18th that month—that area in rear of beaches at Aola had been explored on foot to a depth of five miles. Said it consisted of swamp lands alternating with steep hog-back ridges, and was accessible only through swamps and low, muddy trails. He recommended that Volinavua, much nearer the perimeter on the edge of extensive plains, be considered instead.

Another Marine Corps unit destined to have a spectacular sojourn on the island was designated the landing group and initial security force. Two companies (C and E) of the 2d Raider Battalion (under Lieutenant Colonel Evans F. Carlson) embarked late in October at Espiritu Santo for the purpose.²

On 22 October, Lieutenant Colonel Carlson had come to the perimeter from Espiritu Santo for the purpose of putting the final touches to plans for an operation against the enemy. He planned to land his battalion of approximately 750 men (troops with a minimum of combat experience, who had taken part only in the Makin Island Raid) at Beaufort Bay,³ on the southwest coast of the island and, with the help of native carriers and the coastwatchers who were active in the area, to initiate a program of guerilla warfare. It

was felt that the nature of the terrain, the fact that the indigenous population was on the whole sympathetic where it was not actively friendly, and the heterogeneous character of the enemy forces would make possible the successful application of T. E. Lawrence's theories. The plan, in any case, however, was abandoned⁴ when it became neces-

⁴ On 2 November, Commander Task Force 62 included the following paragraph in his Outline Plan of Task Force 62 for operations subsequent to 2 November.

1. FULLER, MCKEAN, MANLEY, 2DD

After return from CACTUS, depart BUTTON November 6 or 7 with the Second Marine Raider Battalion and Third Infantry Battalion of 182d Infantry; forty days' supplies; three units of fire. Land at BEAUFORT BAY or WANDERER BAY, or both, for operations against enemy flank and rear. Photos have been requested but not received. Arrange timing with Commanding General, CACTUS.

² *War Diary*, Commander, Task Force 62.

³ *Final Report*, Phase V, Annex N.



ADDITIONAL UNITS ARRIVE. Fresh troops from the 2d Marine Division during a halt. Note clean-shaven faces and good condition of equipment and clothing.

sary for two companies (C and E) of the 2d Raider Battalion to be used in the Aola Bay operation (see above).

The development of an airfield at Aola was attempted, but the difficulties which had been foreseen by Captain Clemens and by General Vandegrift made its success impossible. A foregone failure, the project was abandoned, and the troops involved were moved westward to the perimeter about a month after the landing. The 1st Battalion, 147th Infantry, joined its regimental headquarters and the 3d Battalion at Koli Point on 29 November, and the regiment subsequently took an active part in the final drive toward Cape Esperance.⁵

FURTHER ACTION ON THE MATANIKAU

In order to take advantage of the disruption which had been caused the enemy by his defeat at the perimeter in the latter part of October, still another offensive was planned which, it was hoped, would wipe out the enemy forces between the Matanikau river and Kokumbona and permit establishment of an advanced patrol base near that village.⁶ Such an offensive would have the effect also of pushing back, and out of range of the airfield, Japanese artillery now in position beyond the Matanikau.

The impending arrival of additional units—the 8th Marines (Colonel Richard H. Jeschke), with an attached 75mm pack-howitzer battalion (1st Battalion, 10th Marines under Lieutenant Colonel Presley M. Rixey), was aboard ship and on the way from Samoa⁷—allowed General Vandegrift to allocate a larger force to the operation than had

⁵ *History, 147th Infantry*, p. 1, Guadalcanal Document 1-CCC, Marine Corps records.

⁶ *Final Report*, Phase V, p. 27.

⁷ Other supporting troops attached to the 8th Marines were:

- Company B, 2d Tank Battalion
- Company B, 2d Engineer Battalion
- Company B (Transport), 2d Service Battalion
- Companies B and C, 2d Medical Battalion

Report of Operation, 8th Marines, p. 2.

yet been assigned to a similar task. Operation Order 13-42,⁸ in promulgating plans for the action, contained the following salient points:

It was thought that the Japanese 2d Division had suffered great loss in recent actions along the Lunga and the Matanikau, and that, since it had been one of the groups stationed between Point Cruz and Tassafaronga, forces in that area had been depleted.

The equivalent of two full regiments would be used, and air support would be given. It was planned, tentatively, to use naval gun-fire support as well.

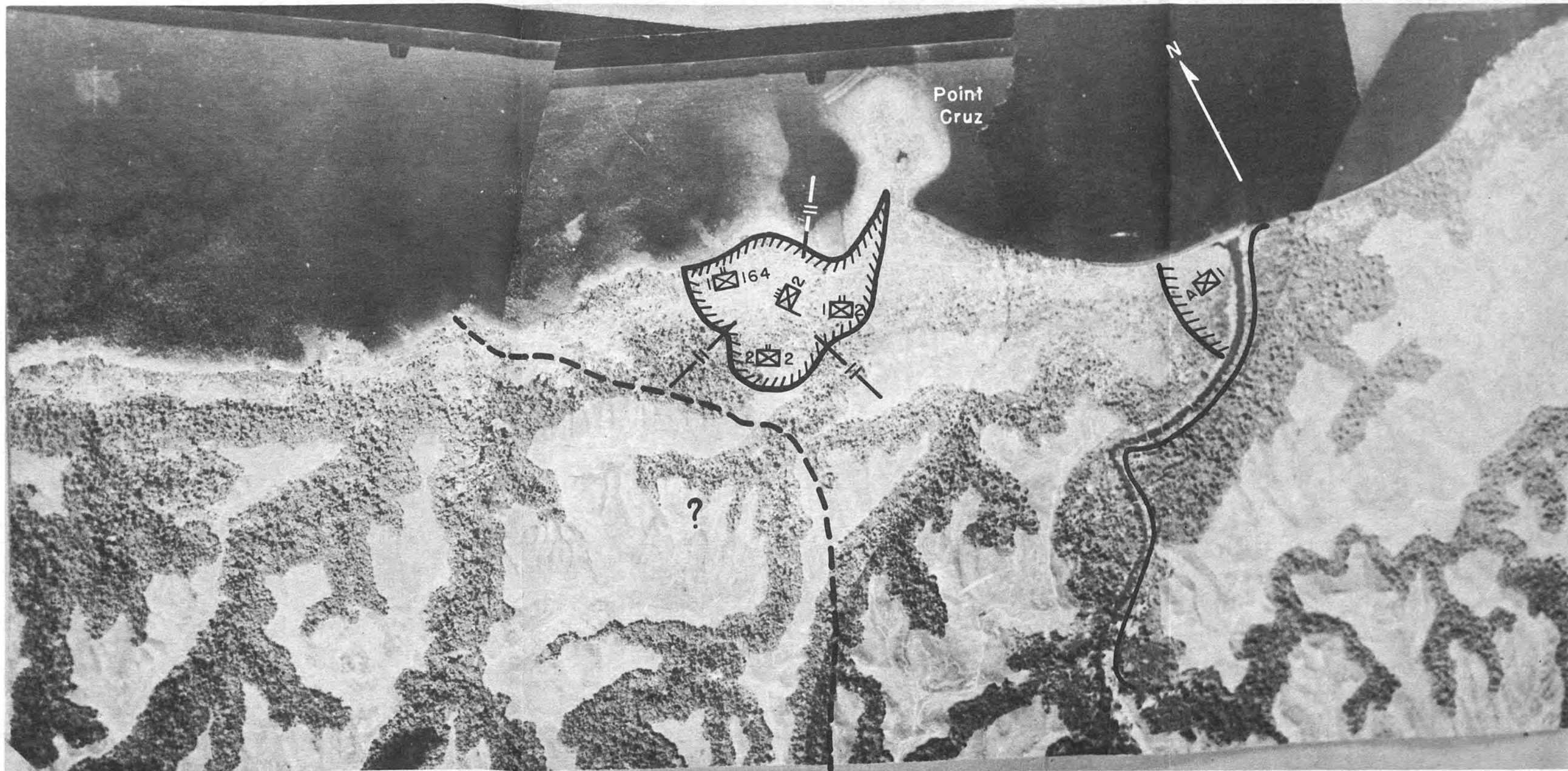
Artillery from the 11th Marines was to displace forward where necessary to support the attack up to the Poha River.

In order to get away from the necessity of confining the routes of approach of the assault forces to crossings at the mouth of the Matanikau and the Nippon Bridge, inadequate in any case for the number of men involved, engineer units were to construct four bridges approximately 1000 yards from the mouth, where the river is a slow, deep lagoon. Plans also called for the construction of a vehicular bridge between this point and the mouth by 1 November. This was accomplished and the bridge (10-ton capacity) was ready for use when a road had been cut through to join the coastal road east of Point Cruz.⁹

The plan of attack was essentially that which had been used before with moderate success by smaller groups. The 5th Marines, with units of the Division Special Weapons Battalion attached, would attack west on a front of approximately 1,500 yards, two battalions abreast, 2d Battalion on left, 1st Battalion on right, with the right flank on the beach. The main effort would be made along the high ground in the center of the zone of action. Immediately behind the 5th Marines, and prepared to carry on the attack by relieving any part of the assault regiment or by assuming a part of the task of the assault on the left flank of the 5th Marines, the 1st and 2d Battalions of the 2d Marines, recently

⁸ *Final Report*, Phase V, Annex K.

⁹ Letter, Crockett to CMC.



RD 6172

OPERATIONS ABOUT POINT CRUZ in early November are depicted on this photo-overprint.



THE ENGINEERS SUCCEEDED in constructing three bridges during the night of 31 October for the assault of the 5th Marines.

arrived from Tulagi and comparatively fresh, would advance in the right half of the zone of action.

In order to protect the left, or inland, flank, the Whaling Group, consisting of the 3d Battalion, 7th Marines, and the Scout-Sniper Detachment, was to operate along the ridges and ravines to the south.

One interesting item in the order is that which directs that artillery or mortar fire be directed at each objective prior to the assault and upon each ravine and stream line suspected of harboring enemy prior to the passage by infantry.

The attack was launched as planned on 1 November and was well on the way to a successful conclusion when unforeseen circumstances, entirely unconnected with the operation itself, made it necessary for General Vandegrift to alter his plans drastically and quickly.¹⁰ These circumstances will be treated in due course. In the meanwhile, the attack across the Matanikau is deserving of description.

On the night of 31 October, Companies A, C, and D, 1st Engineer Battalion, succeeded

in constructing three bridges. By 0200, 1 November, one platoon of Company E, 2d Battalion, 5th Marines, had crossed the river in rubber boats to cover passage of the balance of the battalion, the rest of company following just before dawn.¹¹ During this time the bivouac area of the regiment, in the flat land east of the mouth of the river, received light artillery fire from enemy positions to the westward.¹²

The attack, preceded by air strikes, artillery preparation, and fire from naval surface craft, moved out on schedule. Crossings made at the mouth of the river and by means of the newly constructed footbridges were completed by 0700, and the regiment advanced with two battalions abreast, 1st Battalion on the right.¹³ By 0800 the 3d Battalion, in regimental reserve, had crossed and was following generally in the inland zone of action of the 2d Battalion.

The 2d Battalion, 5th Marines, operating along the high ground some hundreds of

¹¹ Letter, H. S. Connor to CMC, 14 February 1949.

¹² *Final Report*, Annex P (5th Marines, entry 31 October).

¹³ *Ibid.* Entry 1 November.

¹⁰ *Final Report*, Phase V, p. 28.

yards in from the coast, met no determined opposition. Its first objective was reached by 1000 and its second, by 1440. At the time of jump-off from the first objective, however, it lost contact with the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, on the right.¹⁴

The latter battalion, in the meanwhile, had come up against exactly the type of resistance which had been foreseen when the operation order had been made up. Stiff opposition from small arms and automatic weapons developed along the left front of the battalion—Company A, moving forward on the right, with its right flank on the beach, met with no obstacle in its passage over the flat land in its zone of action, the area which had been devastated by the artillery concentration which broke up a threatened enemy assault late in October. Company C, to its left, however, moving along a ridge which lay parallel to its axis of advance, ran head-first into strong resistance from a well emplaced enemy force in a ravine to its front. Heavy casualties were suffered in the ensuing fire fight, and the company withdrew a short distance along the ridge.

At this point Company B, in regimental reserve, was committed in the gap which had opened between Companies A and C, and began working on the enemy strong point from the mouth of the ravine which sheltered it. An attempted envelopment of the position failed when a ten man patrol under the commanding officer of Company B went around behind Company C's position to strike from the southeast. It, too, suffered casualties and was forced to withdraw.

During the afternoon, elements of the 3d Battalion, 5th Marines were ordered into the line of the 1st Battalion, Companies I and K going into position between the base of Point Cruz—the point to which Company A had pushed during the day—and the right flank of Company B.

During the morning of 2 November, the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines, requested permission to attempt a flanking movement by shifting its axis of advance to the northward in

order to envelope the enemy on the flat land below the ridges. By this time, the 2d Marines, having crossed the river and moved overland, were in position behind the 2d Battalion and in reserve. Permission was granted and Whaling, in position on the left of the 2d Battalion, was advised of the impending move and directed to take over in the 2d Battalion's zone when that battalion had completed its planned movement.

By 1400 on 2 November, the enemy was partially boxed in. The 3d Battalion, on the flat land, was in contact on its left front, while one company—Company L—had been committed to the left of Company C. The 2d Battalion had gone into position along a ridge parallel to the beach and several hundred yards inland, and was facing due north.

In order to complete the encirclement of the Japanese, the left flank company of the battalion, Company F, was ordered to move northward in column and face eastward, to take the pressure off the 3d Battalion, which was attempting to move west. The movement was carried out without incident, and Company F, with one machine gun platoon attached, went into position faced with the necessity of defending itself from possible attacks from both the east and the west.¹⁵

Late in the afternoon after heavy artillery, machine gun, and mortar preparation two companies of the 3d Battalion pushed forward—Companies I and K—and immediately ran into opposition from a strong enemy group between the coastal road and the beach. Led by Captain Erskine Wells, commanding Company I, the Marines rushed the enemy in the only authenticated U.S. bayonet charge of the operation. They wiped out the pocket—a group distinct from that which was in position in the ravine before the left front of the battalion—and pushed down the beach to Company F's position. There they helped the latter company establish a perimeter defense for the night. During their rush, which had advanced the battalion's lines to a point about

¹⁴ *Record of Events*, 5th Marines, entry of 1 November.

¹⁵ An apocryphal tale has the company commander encouraging his men with the following words: "Cheer up, boys, we have the Japs right where they want us."

1,500 yards west of the base of Point Cruz, the two companies captured one 70mm field piece, four 37mm antitank guns and a number of machine guns.

An attempt was made by the regiment to clean out the enemy in place in the ravine by using 75mm half tracks, the self propelled weapon that had accounted for one of the enemy tanks at the mouth of the Matanikau a week before. These vehicles were stalled in their attempt by the rough terrain of a dry stream bed, and for the night were protected by a perimeter defense set up by Headquarters Company, 3d Battalion, 5th Marines, and Company D, 164th Infantry.

Final phases of the attack began at 0800 on the morning of 3 November, when the 2d Battalion, less Company F, swept north toward the beach from its position along the ridge. On its left, Companies F, I, and K held fast initially to prevent any attempt on the part of the encircled enemy to break free. One such attempt had already been made, when the Japanese launched a bayonet attack at 0630 against the section of the western line held by Companies I and K, and had been repulsed.

The 2d Battalion attack was pushed forward and the enemy was compressed into the northwest corner of the pocket. As the battalion moved north and then northwest, Companies I and K, facing east toward the encircled enemy, anchored their left flank on the beach and pivoted around it, in contact with the 2d Battalion on their right, and joining in the movement to the north.

While the 2d Battalion was beginning its final movement to the beach, Company D, 164th Infantry, moved up the beach road, flushed out bypassed groups of enemy, and drove them into the pocket, and elements of the 2d Marines, moving westward along the ridges parallel to the beach, began cutting northward beyond the scene of action to turn back any attack from the west.

By noon of 3 November, two new developments occurred in the area. The rest of the 1st Battalion, 164th Infantry, had been ordered into the action, and the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, had been directed to return to

the perimeter to take up defensive positions on the eastern sector.

While these movements were taking place, the *coup de grace* was being given the last of the enemy within the pocket, and the Japanese force was annihilated, losing at least 239 killed. Included among the 28 officers who fell was a full colonel, unidentified, who was taken to be a regimental commander. Captured materiel, including the items mentioned above as having been taken by Companies I and K, consisted of one 70mm field piece, 12 37mm antitank guns, and 34 machine guns.¹⁶

THE KOLI POINT ACTION

Concurrently with the formulation of plans for the operation toward Kokumbona, the outcome of which has just been described, Vandegrift had been receiving news of a disquieting character from higher echelons.¹⁷ Intelligence data received from coastwatchers stationed near Rabaul, who had been able to maintain an incredibly complete log of enemy shipping and movement in that port, indicated for some time a renewed enemy effort

¹⁶ *Final Report*, Phase V, p. 28. The narrative of the action has been put together from accounts by Lieutenant Colonel William H. Barba, Lieutenant Colonel Gordon D. Gayle, and Lieutenant Colonel L. W. Walt. *Final Report*, Phase V, narrative section, gives a superficial and not too accurate account, although valuable details are contained in Appendix P to that document.

¹⁷ *Final Report*, Phase V, pp. 28 and 29. "On 1 November it had been definitely established that a small covering force would land east of Koli Point during the night of 3-4 November." More encouraging developments were not absent during the period, however. On 3 November, the day which saw the successful conclusion of the western action, two three-gun batteries of 155mm guns came ashore. One battery of the 3d Defense Battalion (GPF's) and one of the 244th Coast Artillery Regiment (M1's) landed and went into position immediately. For the first time, effective counterbattery fire was possible, the 5-inch guns of the 3d Defense Battalion having been proved too vulnerable because of their fixed and relatively exposed position. Letter, Lieutenant Colonel Charles M. Nees to Commandant, Marine Corps, 2 February 1949.

in the direction of Guadalcanal. The missing details of the movement were forthcoming when, on 1 November, Halsey advised Vandegrift that Koli Point was believed to represent the current enemy target and suggested that Vandegrift be prepared for activity in that area. Since a landing there would present a threat to the perimeter as well as serve to cut off land communications with the engineer force now scheduled to land and begin preliminary work on the projected airstrip at Aola on 3 November, he decided to put troops in a position to disperse or destroy the enemy unit.

Accordingly, the 2d Battalion, 7th Marines, badly fatigued from combat¹⁸ (it had been involved in Conoley's spectacular action of 24-26 October), was ordered to the threatened area on 1 November.¹⁹ Movement by truck to the Tenaru River was completed by 1431, and the battalion camped on the west bank of the river for the night. A forced march was begun the next morning, and by nightfall the battalion was in position along the beach, east of the Metapona River.²⁰

The battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel Herman H. Hanneken, deployed his force from the river mouth to a spot 2,000 yards to the east, scattered under the shelter of the woods which bordered the beach and in position to disrupt any landing to his front which might be attempted. The battalion was in no position, on the other hand, to do much should the enemy elect to put his forces ashore at any other point—to the eastward, for instance.²¹

That is, in fact, what happened. At 2230, 2 November, ships which appeared to be one cruiser, one destroyer and one small troopship, stood well in to shore at a position about 1,000 yards east of the extreme right flank company, Company F. In spite of rain and

¹⁸ "Many of the men of 2d Battalion, 7th Marines, had no socks and in these forced marches developed blisters and bleeding sores. No socks were available." Letter, Wieseman to CMC.

¹⁹ *Final Report*, Phase V, p. 29.

²⁰ *Report of Operations*, November 1-3, 2d Battalion, 7th Marines, p. 1.

²¹ *Report of Operations*, November 1-3, 2d Battalion, 7th Marines, p. 1, paragraphs 3, 4, and 5.

limited visibility, it was seen that the landing was taking place at that point and that there was no possibility of dealing with it at the moment. Three hours later a second destroyer came down from the west, closed inland, and by 0200 on 3 November the ships cleared the area.²²

An unfortunate circumstance had prevented the battalion commander from reporting his position. Because of weather conditions,²³ the radios with which the battalion was equipped could not get through to the perimeter, and in spite of the efforts of the communication personnel, it was not until some time after noon on 3 November that momentary contact was made.

Contact with the enemy force began at daybreak when a reconnaissance patrol composed of eight enemy soldiers blundered into the Marine positions and was fired upon. Four were killed, and the remainder escaped into the woods.

Immediately the enemy patrol had been fired upon, Hanneken realized that his presence had been revealed to the main enemy force and decided to strike first. His first move was to place a heavy 81mm mortar concentration upon the area used for the enemy landing—his report also stated that he hoped that the sound of the firing would be heard and interpreted correctly at division headquarters, with which he had not yet succeeded in establishing communication.

The initial response to his action was negative in both directions. There was no sign of reaction on the part of the enemy, and there was no indication that his hopes for a

²² Enemy troops landed included one battalion of 228th Infantry Regiment, a part of the 38th Division in Bougainville. Its immediate task was to make contact with surviving elements of the 230th Infantry. *USAFISPA Report*, p. 28.

²³ *Report of Operations*, November 1-3, p. 2. The report says that electrical disturbances caused operational difficulties. LtCol Conoley says that the real cause was a thorough soaking both sets had received during the rains of the day and the preceding night. Although the *Final Report* says that communication was not established until the 4th, all other subsidiary records agree that it was established on the 3d.

response from the division would be fulfilled.²⁴

The puzzling lack of retaliatory measures on the part of the enemy finally led the battalion commander to believe that only a small force had landed.

He had decided to attack when he received a report that several hundred enemy troops were advancing along the beach toward his positions. Fire from machine guns and from mortars was immediately placed upon the column, which broke and dispersed in the band of woods that fringed the beach. For 15 minutes there was no response other than scattered rifle fire, and the battalion continued to inflict casualties upon the enemy force.

At that time, however, heavy mortar fire began to fall upon the right (east) flank company, Company F. Almost at the same time artillery fire began to fall behind the battalion, in the bay. As the range was lowered, and as the fire became more accurate, it could be seen that one enemy piece was in position down the beach. This was brought under fire by the mortars, which were emplaced near the mouth of the river on the right bank.²⁵

The position of the battalion at this time was becoming untenable. Mortar and artillery fire were falling on the area held by Company F, and that unit was suffering casualties. Mortar ammunition was beginning to run low. Furthermore, there had been no success as yet in establishing communication with division. Even the expedient of trying to communicate with planes which were overhead constantly on their way from the airfield had no results.²⁶

Hanneken therefore arrived at the only decision possible under the circumstances—that of fighting a withdrawing action and taking up a better position west of the Metapona

²⁴ The firing was heard at the command post, but since there had been no message from the battalion since it had left the perimeter, division was at a complete loss to explain its significance.

²⁵ *Report of Operations*, 2d Battalion, 7th Marines, November 1-3, p. 2.

²⁶ *Report of Operations*, 2d Battalion, 7th Marines, p. 2, para. 5.

River. A problem was immediately posed by the character of the river, for the only easy route of crossing lay across a sand bar at the mouth. This crossing, easy though it was, lay in full view of the enemy, and it was, therefore, necessary to cross further upstream, under considerable difficulty.

Withdrawal took place in the following order:

Company F, with 24 wounded and two 81mm mortars.

Company G, with the remaining two mortars.

The Command Group.

Company E.

The movement was successful, and no casualties were suffered as it was being carried out.²⁷ Before the battalion succeeded in occupying its new position, however, an attack was launched upon it from the west, the rear of the unit.²⁸ This blow apparently was delivered by a small unit landed from the lone destroyer observed the previous night.²⁹

At about this time, the battalion was able to communicate momentarily with Division, and word was sent back that boats were needed badly for the evacuation of wounded, and that the battalion was withdrawing to the west of the Metapona.³⁰

At the perimeter, in the meanwhile, three actions were occupying the attention of General Vandegrift—the large-scale drive to the westward, the involvement of the 2d Bat-

²⁷ *Ibid.*, para. 6.

²⁸ *Report of Operations*, 2d Battalion, 7th Marines, p. 3, para. 6.

²⁹ It is possible, however, that the attack may have been launched by elements of the 230th Infantry, a unit of the 2d Division, which had been scheduled to attack the airfield from the southeast in the battle of 24-26 October. Orders issued by Lieutenant General Hyakutake, commanding general of the 17th Army, who had landed 10 October 1942 at Tassafaronga and established his command post in that area, directed that the 230th Infantry be reinforced by one battalion of the 228th Infantry from Bougainville. The latter unit landed east of Koli Point as described above, and the 230th may have been attempting to make contact with it. *USAFISPA Report*, pp. 14 and 28.

³⁰ *Report of Operations*, 2d Battalion, 7th Marines, p. 3, para. 6.



HEAVY CASUALTIES WERE SUFFERED by the 5th Marines on 1 November

talion, 7th Marines, near the Metapona, and the landing of the conglomerate force at Aola. As soon as Hanneken's message was received, General Vandegrift realized that a serious situation was developing,³¹ and the 1st Battalion, 7th Marines, with the command echelon of the regiment, was immediately advised that it would be moved by boat from Lunga to the Metapona. The battalion was able to move from its post on the perimeter in the sector containing the Ridge to the beach, ready to embark, in less than two hours, departing at about 1900.

Regular communication with the perimeter was established by the 2d Battalion, 7th Ma-

³¹ *Final Report*, Phase V, p. 29. The involved actions which followed this contact by Hanneken's battalion are given only sketchy and not overly accurate treatment in this report.

ines,³² late in the evening of 3 November, and Hanneken was apprised of the situation.

At 1510 General Vandegrift had sent a message to Hanneken to the effect that he had instructed aviation to "hit everything east of Koli Point."³³ Ten minutes later he sent a second message, telling him of sending two battalions as reinforcement.

The air units took their instructions literally, for the first message (sent at 1740) that reached the perimeter after reestablishment of communications was a plea to have planes cease operating since they were bombing the battalion's positions. Twenty minutes later a similar message came in, and one hour after that, at 1900, a third and urgent

³² *Report of Operations*, 2d Battalion, 7th Marines, p. 3, para. 7.

³³ *D-3 Journal*, 3 November, message #6.

message told of the strafing of the battalion by friendly planes, a mishap which had caused casualties to the already badly understrength battalion.³⁴

Hanneken, meanwhile, had decided to fight his way through the enemy force which lay between him and the perimeter and take up position immediately west of the mouth of the Nalimbiu River. The movement was accomplished without incident, the battalion moving along the beach and through the brush about 100 yards inland. Sporadic firing occurred, but no resistance was met.³⁵

Upon arriving at the desired position, Hanneken established a small beachhead, extending 400 yards along the beach and 300 yards inland.³⁶ Puller's battalion and the command echelon of the 7th Marines landed within this perimeter, and went into bivouac for the night, the movement from Lunga Lagoon having been completed by shortly after midnight on the night of 3-4 November.

At 0500 on 4 November the two battalions began to develop the situation, attacking abreast eastward with the 1st Battalion on the right. They were in position on the west bank of the Nalimbiu by 0830, and patrols were pushed across the river and to the south.³⁷

No further advance was undertaken during the day, although patrolling continued, and one enemy field piece was located and destroyed 100 yards in front of the line held by Hanneken's battalion. Also, during the afternoon, artillery emplaced east of the perimeter fired harassing fires into the area oc-

cupied by the enemy, as did two cruisers and two destroyers lying off Koli Point.

The same positions were held next day, in order to allow time for a part of the 164th Infantry to get into position (see below for the plans involving this unit). During the night of 5-6 November the enemy began retiring eastward, away from the vicinity of the Nalimbiu, and during the daylight hours of 6 November there was no activity to the front of the two battalions. Late in the afternoon orders were issued to both battalions directing them to move out the following morning at 0600.³⁸

In the meanwhile, the command structure of the American forces had been modified to allow the 1st Marine Division Headquarters to function, in effect, as a corps headquarters. The number of units, Marine and Army, had increased until there were present on the island six infantry regiments and part of a seventh, part of a raider battalion, the equivalent of two artillery regiments, portions of two defense battalions, and a large and growing number of specialized units. The

³⁴ All details of the remainder of this action are taken, unless otherwise noted, from the *Record of Events*, 7th Marines, November, 1942, and from the supplementary statements filed with that document.

³⁴ *D-3 Journal*, 3 November, messages 13, 14, and 17.

³⁵ *Final Report*, Phase V, p. 29, refers to this as a dogged rear-guard action. Conoley, Hanneken's executive at the time, corrects this. He explained, during a series of interviews in April and May, 1948, that, during the movement to the west, along the beach and the road, enemy inland from the beach kept up a constant sporadic firing, but there was no trouble from the rear. See also *Report of Operations*, 2d Battalion, 7th Marines, p. 3.

³⁶ *Record of Events*, 7th Marines, November, 1942. Pencil account of movement and landing filed with entry of 3 November.

³⁷ *Record of Events*, 7th Marines, November, 1942. Entries of 4 November.



GUNFIRE SUPPORT BY DAY, TORPEDOES BY NIGHT, was destroyer routine during November and December off Guadalcanal. This picture shows a 5-inch gun giving aid and comfort to Marines on shore.

tactical direction of such a force imposed a grave problem upon General Vandegrift, especially since actions were now being conducted to the east and the west simultaneously. It was therefore decided to interpose an echelon of command between the division and regimental levels.

On 4 November the American zone was divided in two sectors, the East Sector and the West Sector, each under tactical control of a brigadier general. These sector commanders, in turn, were responsible to, and received their orders from, the Commanding General, 1st Marine Division. General Rupertus, recalled from Tulagi on 3 November for the purpose, was placed in command of the East Sector, while Brigadier General Edmund B. Sebree, USA, Assistant Division Commander of the Americal Division, was placed in control of the West Sector.

Rupertus at once assumed charge of operation to the east. The 164th Infantry (less 1st Battalion) had been ordered out of the perimeter on 3 November to travel overland until it reached a point directly south of the area occupied by the enemy force. At that time it was to turn northward and drive toward the beach, establishing contact with the two battalions of the 7th Marines that were already in contact with the enemy force.³⁹ Company B, of the newly arrived 8th Marines, was ordered out as security for the Sector Command Post and for the artillery of the 1st Battalion, 10th Marines, emplaced east of the perimeter in general support of operations of the 7th Marines and the 164th Infantry.⁴⁰

The 164th Infantry moved out on 4 November, and, after a difficult movement through the jungle, came into position on the west bank of the Nalimbiu, 4000 yards inland, late in the afternoon of the same day. It went into bivouac there without having established contact with either battalion of the 7th Marines, two miles north.

On 5 November, following receipt of orders from General Rupertus, the infantry regiment crossed the Nalimbiu and swung

northward, with the 3d Battalion leading and the 2d Battalion following to the right (east) and slightly to the rear. Moderate rifle fire was encountered, from right front and right flank, but the battalions pressed onward toward the coast, arriving south of the enemy force. The movement was completed by the night of 6-7 November, and a few hours later, Regimental Headquarters and Company E, 164th Infantry, arrived by boat in the terrain held by 2d Battalion, 7th Marines.⁴¹

Up to early morning of 7 November, Hanneken's battalion, together with Puller's, had been in position on the west bank of the Nalimbiu River. At 0600 they moved forward, crossing the river and arriving at the west bank of the Metapona between 1345 and 1600. No resistance had been encountered on the way, and patrols which were sent out immediately into territory beyond the Metapona penetrated the area for 2000 yards and returned without making contact with the enemy.⁴²

Movement to the east was resumed at 0600 on 8 November. This day's advance was marked by an encircling movement on the part of Hanneken's battalion. This unit, from its position near the mouth of the river, crossed it, passed southeast forward of the line held by Puller, swinging gradually east and then northeast.⁴³ Puller, by this time (approximately three hours after Hanneken's battalion had moved out) began moving his 1st Battalion, 7th Marines, across the river. At this time also, the 2d Battalion, 164th Infantry, was moving slowly northward through the jungle and grass land of the interior in an attempt to make contact with the Marines.

The two Marine battalions met with different degrees of resistance. The 2d Battalion, 7th Marines, carried out its movements without making contact with the enemy, passing southeast of the Japanese defensive positions near the beach. Puller, on the other hand, moving directly eastward

³⁹ *Final Report*, Phase V, p. 29. *D-3 Journal*, 5 November, message 11.

⁴⁰ *Report of Operation*, 8th Marines, p. 8.

⁴¹ *Record of Events*, 7th Marines, 7 November.

⁴² *R-3 Report*, 7th Marines, 7 November.

⁴³ *R-3 Report*, 7th Marines, 8 November.

against those positions, met strong opposition from automatic weapons and mortars. The battalion suffered casualties of four killed, two missing, and 31, including Colonel Puller himself, wounded. The colonel remained with his battalion until the next morning, when the multiple fragmentation wounds⁴⁴ he had suffered incapacitated him, and on orders from Frisbie, the Regimental Executive Officer, turned over command of the battalion to Major John E. Weber.

Nightfall of 8 November found the two battalions of the 7th Marines facing each other across an almost impenetrable tract of jungle, with the enemy force, now estimated by Hanneken to be of battalion strength,⁴⁵ in strong positions between them. About three hundred yards to Hanneken's front was a small, deep creek, running parallel to his lines, while Weber's force was in position on the west bank of a larger, lagoon-like stream. The latter was of such size as to allow passage by fording only at the mouth, at low tide, or at points extending from 1000 yards upstream. The streams were parallel, about 700 yards apart.

During the day Weber had been notified that the 2d Battalion, 164th Infantry, less Company E, would report to him for employment on his right (inland) flank. The plan was to have this unit extend its lines eastward for the purpose of making contact with the left flank elements of Hanneken's force, thus completing the envelopment of the enemy force. Reporting on the morning of the 9th, the Army battalion set up its command post near Weber's and the two rifle companies—F and G—were led to the right flank and briefed thoroughly on their mission. Their movement began at once.⁴⁶

In the meanwhile, Hanneken was in position in the territory previously occupied by the enemy force which had landed on the night of 2-3 November. He had found much materiel—landing boats, 70mm ammunition,

⁴⁴ Succinctly described by Puller to LtCol Conoley as a "fanny full of shrapnel."

⁴⁶ Letter, LtCol John E. Weber to CMC, 11 January 1949.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

demolition charges, medical supplies, and cavalry bits—all of which he destroyed.

At 1100 on 9 November, Hanneken was alerted for an attack to the west, and 51 minutes later his lines began moving forward. Companies G and E were in line from right to left, while Company F had as its mission a flanking movement around the left (inland) flank. One platoon of Company H was assigned to each rifle company.⁴⁷

First contact was made at 1330, when a small enemy group was encountered and driven back. By 1448 the battalion lines extended generally north and south, with the companies in the same relative position as when the movement began, with the right flank of Company G on the beach, Company E pressing forward and in contact with G on the right and F on the left, and Company F moving wide on the inland flank, flanking the enemy position and attempting to establish contact with elements of Weber's force to the west.

At about this time, the enemy main body had been located in position protected by the stream in front of Hanneken's lines, within Company E's zone of action. Contact was made by this company, which sustained 10 casualties as a result.⁴⁸

Hanneken determined to force the position. Company G, on the right, was directed to begin a sweeping movement to turn the enemy left flank, while Company E, already in contact, began to move forward. Within an hour, one platoon of Company G was also in contact, and twenty minutes later, at 1602, it had forced its way across the creek near the mouth and had begun to build up a firing line.

Company E, however, attacking the enemy main body in a frontal assault, had found it impossible to carry its objective. Pressing forward in the face of heavy resistance from small arms and machine guns, by 1702 the company had forced its way to the west bank of the stream through water of armpit depth. The volume and accuracy of enemy fire, however, broke up every effort of the men to

⁴⁷ *Report of Operations*, 2d Battalion, 7th Marines.

⁴⁸ *Report of Operations*, 2d Battalion, 7th Marines.

get up onto the bank and establish a firing line. Hanneken, in the face of such resistance, and with night falling, accepted the inevitable, broke contact, and withdrew 200 yards to higher ground, where he re-formed his lines for the night.

While this action, which had cost the battalion 18 dead and 30 wounded, had been in progress, inland elements of both Hanneken's and Weber's battalions had been attempting to establish contact. We have seen that the mission of the 2d Battalion, 164th Infantry, operating from the west, was to close the gap between the inland flanks of the two Marine battalions. Company F, 7th Marines, moving from the east, had a similar mission in addition to its main task of turning the enemy right flank.⁴⁹

While Hanneken was withdrawing to his position for the night, Company E, 164th Infantry was landed from boats in his area and reported to him. It was immediately assigned positions on the left of Company F, his left flank company, and his lines were thus extended approximately 300 yards.⁵⁰

In the meanwhile, Companies F and G, 164th Infantry, had spent the afternoon attempting to close the inland gap which separated the left and right flanks respectively of Hanneken's and Weber's battalions. No report of success had been received by Weber, or by the commanding officer of the 2d Battalion, 164th Infantry.⁵¹

Nightfall of 9 November, therefore, found the situation relatively unchanged save in that the enemy position was definitely known and the difficulty of assaulting it was realized. Hanneken's lines had been moved forward, and his inland flank extended. Weber's lines remained on the west bank of the unnamed creek, and his inland flank likewise had been extended, although he had no reliable information as to the location or the situation of his flank elements. He assumed they were in position south of the enemy pocket. During the night, in preparation for the resumption

of the attack, Hanneken's battalion kept up a constant harassing fire from 60mm mortars.⁵²

Orders from regiment, issued at 0545 on November 10th, called for the closing of the trap around the enemy force and its annihilation. Weber's battalion was to hold fast in the position it occupied, while the elements of the 2d Battalion, 164th Infantry, attached to it the day before, were to wheel to the left, making contact with the inland flank elements of Hanneken's battalion (Company E, 164th). Simultaneous barrages of 81mm mortar fire were to be laid down on the enemy positions by both battalions of the 7th Marines immediately after contact had been made as above.⁵³ It was thought that this could be accomplished by about 0800. Elements of the 164th would attack northward toward the beach, passing between the two streams, immediately after the preparatory fires lifted.

This plan was based upon the assumption that Companies F and G, 164th, were in position south of the enemy pocket, and that a relatively easy movement would allow them to make contact with the force to the east. It will be recalled that neither Weber nor the commanding officer of the 2d Battalion, 164th, had received reports from the two companies. An inspection of his lines during the early morning of the 10th showed Weber that when they had failed to establish contact as ordered, the two infantry companies had withdrawn from their forward positions and had gone into bivouac on the right flank of his inland company.⁵⁴ It would, therefore, be necessary for them to traverse once more the territory they had worked over the previous afternoon before coming into a position whence they could attempt to close the gap.

The attempt was made, punctuated by repeated insistence on the part of the commanding officer of the 164th that orders be followed and contact established.⁵⁵ The deadline

⁴⁹ *Report of Operations*, 2d Battalion, 7th Marines.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ Letter, LtCol John E. Weber to CMC, 11 January 1949.

⁵² *Report of Operations*, 2d Battalion, 7th Marines.

⁵³ Letter, LtCol John E. Weber to CMC, 11 January 1949.

⁵⁴ Letter, Weber to CMC.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

for the mortar barrage came and went without word that the enveloping forces had met, and finally, after a delay of two and one-half hours, it was decided to lay down the fires anyway.⁵⁶

This was done—and once again there was difficulty which arose from imperfect terrain knowledge and faulty maps. Lieutenant Colonel Weber explains it tersely in his letter identified above:

Both the 1st and 2d Battalions, 7th Marines, were to fire a simultaneous 81mm mortar barrage under orders from regiment [in position well to the west of the scene of action. Compiler's note.] into the area between the two units. This was attempted after many delays. . . . In spite of careful planning and coordination of fires, both sides had mis-information of ranges, and as a result, the CP's of both 1-7 and 2-7 exchanged rather close salutes.⁵⁷

The mortar barrage began at 1025. Forty minutes later the 2d Battalion, 164th Infantry, still attempting to carry out its orders, reported that small groups of enemy were being encountered, on the move away from the area under fire.

During the afternoon, Company E, 164th, seems to have lost contact with Hanneken's battalion, to which it was attached, while at the same time failing to find its parent battalion to the west.⁵⁸ At 1428, Company G, 7th Marines, was withdrawn from its right flank position and put on the left flank of Company F, 7th Marines, and ordered to move into the position of E Company, 164th Infantry,

and close the newly opened gap between Company F, 7th Marines, and Company E, 164th Infantry. The latter company was ordered once again to establish contact with the 2d Battalion, 164th Infantry. Once again there was a failure to carry out the assigned mission.

Some time between the hours of 2000 on 10 November and 0500 on 11 November, the entire enemy force, which had been in position along the creek, made its escape through the gap which the 2d Battalion, 164th Infantry, had failed to close. The battalion advanced slowly toward the beach on 11 November, following a wide, sweeping movement to the south on the part of Company E, 164th Infantry, and encountered no opposition, arriving at the beach at noon. All three battalions—1st and 2d Battalions, 7th Marines, and the 2d Battalion, 164th Infantry—thereupon withdrew west of the Metapona River.

During the operation, the 1st Battalion, 7th Marines, had lost 14 killed, two missing, and 39 wounded, while the 2d Battalion, 7th Marines, had lost 21 killed and 61 wounded, including two killed and four injured by a falling tree.

THE SECOND RAIDER BATTALION

In order to cut off and destroy any enemy troops which managed to escape from the planned entrapment, General Vandegrift had enlisted the services of the 2d Raider Battalion.⁵⁹ An air-drop dispatch was sent on 5 November to Lieutenant Colonel Carlson, commanding the Raiders at Aola, giving him his instructions, and, on 6 November, after turning over the Aola security mission to the Infantry battalion, the two Raider companies (C and E) set out.⁶⁰

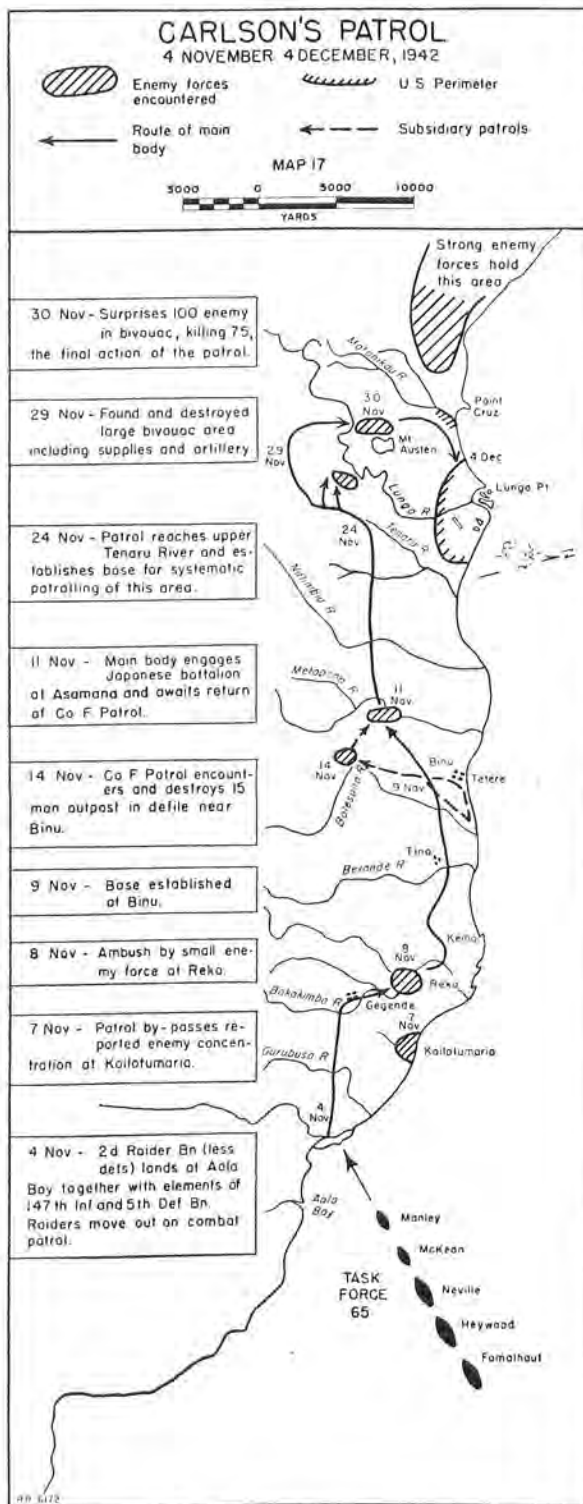
⁵⁹ This group had just landed. Other forces were about to arrive at the perimeter—elements of the 182d Infantry and the 4th Marine Replacement Battalion (Mailgram—7 Nov 42. ComPhibForSoPac).

⁶⁰ The Raider Companies had been retained by Admiral Turner under his control, while the rest of the force had passed to General Vandegrift's control upon landing. *War Diary* CTF62, 26 October 42.

⁵⁶ *Report of Operations*, 2d Battalion, 7th Marines.

⁵⁷ The proximity of the engaged forces, together with the uncertainty as to ranges and the impossibility of accurate observation, made it inadvisable to employ the fire of the 1st Battalion, 10th Marines (Rixey) which was in position to the west, near the Nalimbiu River. Rixey was perturbed at Sims' refusal to allow such fire, and as late as 1949 was of the opinion that he could have supported the operation and perhaps wiped out the pocket. The incident of the mortar fire, however, lends weight to Sims' reasoning. (Rixey's Comments on monograph.)

⁵⁸ Unit Report #52 for 10 November (7th Marines) Paragraph 3: "At 1300, F Company, 164th Infantry, reports enemy fire has pinned them down. . . . Investigation showed it to be a group of enemy equipped with small arms between E-2-164 and F-2-164." Paragraph 4: "At 1400, E Company, 164th, reports enemy firing . . . and has sent out a patrol to contact 2d Bn, 7th Marines."



days later by the entire battalion on its historic patrol through the hills and around the perimeter. This plan consisted, basically, in the employment of strong and aggressively led patrols fanning out in the general direction of the proposed advance, with the command group and the main body following, and located eccentrically with relation to the axis of advance.⁶¹ High mobility and a minimum of inertia were thus accomplished, making it possible to engage the enemy quickly and with great strength at any point of contact, and likewise making it possible to strike from unexpected directions.

The route of advance of the raiders lay through a chain of villages west of Aola until the village of Binu was reached, on the Balesuna River about eight miles inland. This village, the most westerly that was still occupied by its native owners, was used as a base for operations subsequently until the beginning of the extended patrol.

Contact was quickly established by patrol with Marine units from the perimeter, operating east of Koli Point. Aside from small contacts with isolated and wandering Japanese groups, however, no action was fought until after the breakout by the enemy which has been described.

The situation had developed, in other words, in something of the manner in which it had been expected to develop when the 2d Raider Battalion was called from its mission at Aola. This unit, now reinforced by the arrival of Companies B and F, plus a portion of Company D, began operating at once to pursue and destroy the remnants of the enemy force.

By 1000 on 11 November, a patrol consisting of Company E, 2d Raider Battalion, made contact with the 1st Battalion, 7th Marines and learned of the Japanese breakout. Ten minutes later, Company C, Raiders, operating somewhat south of Company E, reported itself heavily engaged with a superior enemy force three miles southwest from the bat-

The route followed lay well inland. Early in the movement, one can find original traces of the tactical plan which was followed some

⁶¹ *Final Report*, Phase V, pp. 30 and 31. All details of the operation of the patrol are taken from the report submitted by Colonel Carlson on 20 December 1942.

talion base at Binu. Company E was ordered to pass up the west bank of the Metapona and attack eastward, while Company D, operating to the northward of Company E's original zone of action, was directed to move straight toward the scene of action.

Two distinct contacts had been made, and neither was decisive. After inspection of the scene of one action, Carlson concentrated his force at Binu. On 12 November, the area was closely inspected once more, and the Raider commander came to the conclusion that it had been organized for occupation by a force of about battalion strength.

We found notices written on paper and tacked to trees indicating where various companies were to go. Our outguards began shooting enemy messengers who attempted to enter, apparently thinking that the position was occupied by their own people. During the day and night of 12 November we killed 25 messengers who tried to enter. One was an officer.⁶²

Further evidence led him to believe that the enemy was in position to his front and, after calling for and receiving artillery fire, upon the threatening area, he was attacked by a Japanese force two companies strong. This attack, and four others similar to it, was repulsed during the afternoon, and artillery fire was used constantly to harass the enemy. This artillery fire came from 1st Battalion, 10th Marines. It was not observed, but was adjusted by radio information from the raiders.

For the next five days scattered actions took place, and by 17 November it became apparent that the enemy main body had escaped to the hills.⁶³ On that day also, Carlson was called to the perimeter for a conference with General Vandegrift relative to further action by his battalion.

The missions outlined during the conference included the following points:

- 1). To locate and explore the suspected trail behind Mount Austen to Kokumbona;
- 2). To determine the presence or absence of enemy concentrations south of the

airfield, for it was still felt that the enemy might be planning an attack from that direction;

- 3). To seek out and destroy the enemy artillery that had been shelling the perimeter from the hinterland;
- 4). To seek out a trail to the top of Mount Austen from the south. It had been reported by patrols from 1st Marines such a trail existed, but there was no adequate information of it.

For the accomplishment of these missions, the battalion was supplied with native bearers, and with advice and guidance from J. V. Mather, an Australian on duty with the 1st Marine Division,⁶⁴ and from Tabasui, a scout from Malaita and member of the native constabulary. Sergeant Major Vouza, likewise of the constabulary, already in the process of becoming a legendary figure in the campaign because of his heroic services, personally guided the battalion through the initial phases of its operation.

The second phase of the 2d Raider Battalion's operation began on 24 November with reconnaissance activity by patrols. After having been augmented by the arrival of Company A from the New Hebrides on 25 November, the operating base of the battalion was moved to the upper Tenaru Valley. Two strong combat groups, each composed of two companies, established subsidiary bases two miles to the right and left fronts of the battalion headquarters, and conducted thorough searches within assigned areas to their fronts. Communication was maintained by radio⁶⁵ between the advanced groups and the battalion headquarters.

On 28 November, one part of the mission was accomplished (see item 3 above) when an enemy artillery position was found on a steep ridge separating the valleys of the Lunga and the Tenaru Rivers. The gun itself was not found, but a quantity of 75mm ammunition in cases bearing the Schneider mark⁶⁶ was found and destroyed. This posi-

⁶² Carlson's Report, p. 6.

⁶³ The enemy main body consisted of the advance echelon (one battalion) of the 228th Infantry and indeterminate elements of the 230th Infantry. USAFISPA Report, p. 28.

⁶⁴ Report of Operations, 2d Raider Battalion, p. 1.

⁶⁵ Report of Operations, 2d Raider Battalion, p. 9.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 9.



CARLSON'S RAIDERS ON THE MARCH, at extreme left, assisted by native bearers who helped make possible the long November patrol outside the perimeter by the 2d Raider Battalion.

tion was found by the group operating on the left (southern) front.

In the meanwhile, the northern group had made an important find in the shape of a well defined trail leading from the upper Tenaru across the hills to the Lunga and thence to the eastern slopes of Mount Austen. Carlson decided to displace forward and establish his base at that point.

On 30 November the movement forward was resumed when the entire battalion crossed the steep ridge separating the two valleys.⁶⁷ A large enemy bivouac was found abandoned on the south bank of the Lunga. Here was found the weapon which had been sought—a 75mm mountain gun—as well as a 37mm antitank gun.

A spectacular action followed almost on the heels of this discovery. Company F was ordered to send out patrols at once to search

⁶⁷ "Ropes were required to scale the cliff, so steep was the slope. On the west side we found the telephone line leading from the artillery position to the west down a narrow ravine. The trail and wire emerged into a large bivouac on the south bank of the Lunga." *Ibid.*, pp. 9 and 10.

the area thoroughly. One of these patrols, one squad strength, came upon an enemy force in bivouac and rocky slope. In spite of the fact that between 90 and 100 enemy were present, the patrol immediately attacked with its automatic weapons. Aided by surprise (which had been mutual) and by the enemy's having stacked his arms, the squad succeeded in almost wiping out the enemy body. Seventy-five Japanese dead were counted after the brief violent encounter, which had taken place during a driving rain. There were no Marine casualties during the action, although one man was killed by a sniper in the area the next day.

Food was delivered to the battalion on 1 December by air drop. Seven trips were made by an R4D from Henderson Field. Seventy-five percent of the supplies dropped were recovered.

On 1 December, orders were received from General Vandegrift to return to the perimeter. By this time Carlson was satisfied that all but one item on the list of missions had been carried out. Only the existence of the southern trail on Mount Austen remained in

doubt, and in order that this matter also be cleared up, Carlson requested and received permission to extend his operations for a few days.

Next day there was the usual fanning out of patrols to the west and southwest. A new artillery position was found to the south of the one already taken, and parts of another gun were found.

On 2 December, specific orders were received for the return to the perimeter, and Carlson began the movement. Splitting the battalion in two parts, he sent one part down the Tenaru, retracing the route already followed. This group arrived at the perimeter on 4 December. The second part, under his command, set out for the Marine positions along the Matanikau, investigating Mount Austen en route.

The next action of the long patrol operation was fought on 3 December on the heights of the mountain. While investigating strong unoccupied enemy positions at what Carlson described as the "hub of a spider web of ridges"⁶⁸ the battalion met a strong enemy combat patrol. This was engaged immediately, and in the ensuing fight, which lasted for about two hours and during which automatic weapons and mortars were used by both sides, Carlson succeeded in executing a double envelopment. This was accomplished only after a similar attempt on the part of the enemy had been circumvented. Enemy dead amounted to 25, while the Marines suffered casualties of four wounded, one of whom died the next day.

On 4 December the last leg of the return journey was begun. The battalion, with Company B as advance guard, commenced the descent of the hill mass with the intention of reaching the Matanikau and following it down toward the coast.

Five hundred yards from the point of departure Company B ran into an ambush, losing one man killed. Once more there was a double envelopment of the enemy, who was in strong, well camouflaged individual positions. Two more men were killed and two

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

wounded before the enemy force of seven was wiped out.⁶⁹

Late in the day the battalion entered Marine lines at the Matanikau positions, its mission accomplished. It had killed 488 enemy since leaving Aola, and in doing so it had lost 16 killed and 18, including one native scout, wounded.

THE BATTLE OF GUADALCANAL⁷⁰

The truly decisive battle for the possession of Guadalcanal, ironically enough, was meanwhile fought well away from the island itself as a series of engagements involving cruiser forces, battleships, and planes. These engagements were spread over a period of several days, and took place at widely separated points. They involved heavy losses in combat surface craft for both the Japanese and the American forces.⁷¹

The actions were decisive and convincing to the Japanese for two reasons. In the first place, the loss of tonnage of transport and cargo ships was a heavy one—eleven ships—even for a nation whose surface strength at the time was superior to that of the Americans. Again, the loss of life in itself was great, for reports of the interrogation of prisoners indicate that the shattered convoy was bringing at least 13,500 men to the island, and the circumstances attending the loss of the ships were such as to indicate that the greater part of these men died before reaching the island.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

⁷⁰ All details of the Battle of Guadalcanal have been taken from *Campaign, USSBS*, pp. 125 to 138.

⁷¹ American losses—Sunk: Antiaircraft cruisers *Atlanta*, *Juneau*; destroyers *Barton*, *Cushing*, *Laffey*, *Monssen*, *Benham*, *Preston*, and *Wake*. Damage was suffered by the battleship *South Dakota*, the heavy cruisers *Portland* and *San Francisco*, and the destroyers *Aaron Ward*, *O'Bannon*, *Sterrett*, and *Gwin*. Japanese losses, exclusive of the transports which are listed in the body of the narrative, were the battleships *Hiei* and *Kirishima*, the cruiser *Kinugasa*, and three destroyers sunk, with three cruisers—the *Maya*, *Isuzu*, and *Chokai*—and six destroyers damaged. *Campaigns, USSBS*, p. 138.

The growth in numbers and in effectiveness of our aviation on Henderson Field,⁷² together with the growing size and aggressiveness of the Navy's surface task groups, had forced the Japanese to resort to an inadequate and unsatisfactory system of supply and reinforcements for their troops on Guadalcanal. By the end of October, it had been decided to abandon, for the moment, attempts to send down troops and materiel by destroyer in hurried trips by night, for it had been learned that by such methods it was impossible to transport the tanks and heavy artillery that were badly needed on the island.

Only late in the campaign had the Japanese been forced to realize that the Marines were determined to hold Henderson Field, at least, and that in holding it they were prepared to risk all planes available on the field, and to employ to the maximum possible extent the task forces afloat in the area. This realization led directly to the decision to send to the island a large convoy of transports, heavily guarded by a strong surface force.⁷³

⁷² On 16 October, the following planes were on Henderson Field, in effective condition:

F4F4	9
SBD	11
P-400	7
P-39	7
Total	34

By 27 November, this strength had been augmented to the following totals:

F4F4	35
SBD	18
TBF	9
J2F	1
OS2U	4
F4F7	1
B17	13
PBO	6
P38	12
P39	16
P400	1
Total	116

Neither of these tabulations includes planes grounded and being repaired or capable of being repaired. *Final Report*, Phase V, Annex A.

⁷³ The great losses suffered by the enemy Navy and Army air forces in the area made proper air-

Following the defeat of the Japanese in the latter part of October, the Hiroshima Division was to reinforce the 27,000 men already on the island. It was this force that was annihilated in the actions which are described below, and with its annihilation the Japanese accepted the fact that they would not be able to retake the island. For, subsequent to that event, although small bodies of reinforcements continued to be sent down until some time in January, the major efforts of Japan were directed toward supplying the troops on the island and evacuating them.⁷⁴

In the western sector, along the Matanikau River, the events of 1 and 2 November had caused a suspension of activities. It will be recalled that the 2d Marines, less 3d Battalion, reinforced by the 1st Battalion, 164th Infantry, had replaced the 5th Marines and the Whaling Group in the line. The troublesome pocket which had held up progress at the base of Point Cruz had been eliminated, and the lines extended generally south from the flat land west of the village of Matanikau.

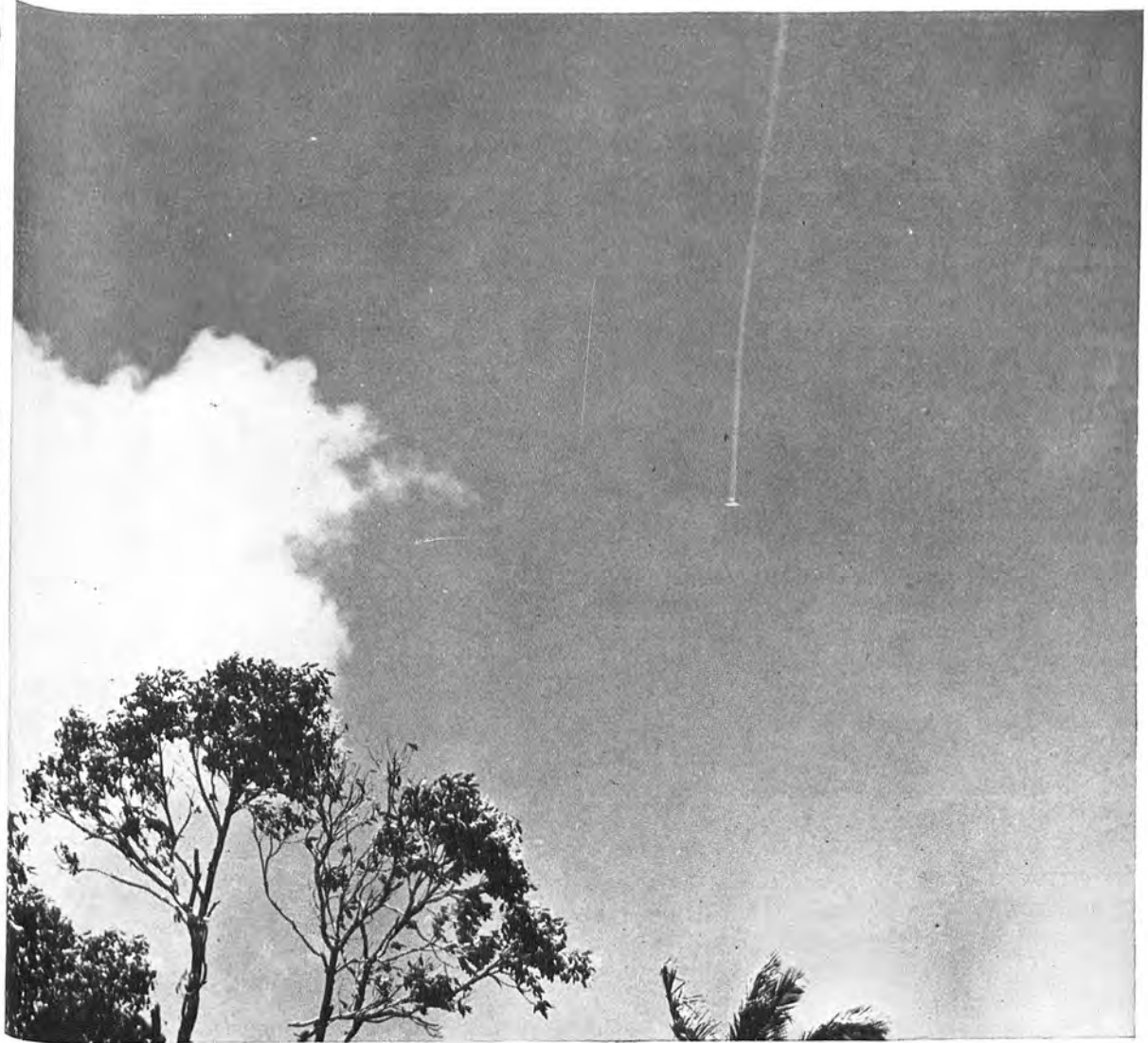
Progress to the westward was continuing through 4 November when developments east of the perimeter made it necessary to suspend the attack, since the problematic outcome of the operations east of Koli Point made wide dispersion of forces undesirable.

By 10 November—the 167th birthday of the Marine Corps—the situation to the east was well enough in hand to allow further attention to be paid to the advance westward. On that day, the attack was resumed, with the 2d Marines in assault and the 8th Marines following in column. No attempts were made to outflank and envelope resistance that was met, and the advance, as a result, was slow.⁷⁵

cover impossible. This information, secured at the end of the war through prisoner interrogation, explains the lack of air resistance encountered by the planes attacking the transports, a circumstance still puzzling to member of the division staff as late as April 1943. *Interrogations*, USSBS. Vol. II, pp. 468, 470-471.

⁷⁴ *USAFISPA Report*, pp. 31 and 32.

⁷⁵ *Final Report*, Phase V, p. 31.



PLUMMETING DOWN, this Japanese bomber has just been hit by Grumman Wildcat fighters of the 1st Marine Air Wing.

Once again, however, an impending blow from the northwest made it necessary to halt the attack and to withdraw troops toward the perimeter. Information received from the coastwatcher in the Buin-Faisi area served notice of the collecting at that point of a group of combat and transport vessels of imposing size—on 10 November there had been visible to him no less than 61 ships, including six cruisers, 33 destroyers, 17 transports, one large cargo liner, and

smaller craft.⁷⁶ Almost coincidentally with the arrival of this news came warning of an air strike, which was delivered on the morning of 11 November in two waves. Again on 12 November there was a heavy air raid on the shipping in the area, during which 30 of the 31 attacking enemy planes were shot

⁷⁶ *The Coastwatchers*, Commander Eric Feldt, RANR, p. 101. See also Annex N (Intelligence) to the *Final Report*, Phase V.

down.⁷⁷ During this attack the heavy cruiser *San Francisco* and the destroyer *Buchanan*, part of the screening force, suffered damage, as did three cargo ships.

On the night of 12-13 November, while the American cargo ships had retired from the area for safety, a small United States task force passed up the Lengo Channel and stood out toward Savo Island. This group, composed of the heavy cruisers *San Francisco*, carrying the flag of Rear Admiral Daniel J. Callaghan, and *Portland*, the light cruiser *Helena*, the light anti-aircraft cruisers *Juneau* and *Atlanta*, and eight destroyers, had as its mission the prevention of the approach of an oncoming Japanese force of far greater numerical strength and fire power. It was known, from aerial observation earlier in the day, that the Japanese group included two battleships (later identified as the *Hiei* and the *Kirishima*), one light cruiser (*Nagara*), and 15 destroyers.

Radar contact was made from the *Helena* at 0124 on 13 November, at 27,000 yards range. Lack of radar equipment on the *San Francisco* made it difficult for Admiral Callaghan to visualize the situation, and it was not until range had been closed to about 2,500 yards that it became clear to him. By this time, the leading American destroyers were almost within the enemy formation, and in maneuvering to fire torpedoes the American force became disorganized. Independent firing began, and difficulty of identification resulted in occasional firing at friendly ships.

Twenty-four minutes after first contact by radar, the area of the American ships was illuminated by the enemy. The Japanese launched torpedoes, which took a heavy toll of destroyers and cruisers. The remaining American ships, however, concentrated their efforts against heavy prey—the battleship *Hiei* was hit 85 times by shells of various caliber, fell out of control, and was scuttled next day by her own crew. Two enemy destroyers were sunk—*Akatsuki* and *Yudachi*—and four others were damaged. The

⁷⁷ *Campaigns USSBS*, p. 125.



MAJ R. E. GALER received the Medal of Honor for conspicuous heroism both as fighter pilot and commanding officer of VMF 224.

surviving enemy ships left the area with their supply and bombardment mission uncompleted.

American losses were heavy, only one ship escaping damage—the destroyer *Fletcher*. *Atlanta* and *Juneau*, were sunk, as well as four destroyers—*Barton*, *Cushing*, *Laffey*, and *Monssen*. *Helena* was damaged. Personnel loss likewise was heavy, including as it did the deaths of Admiral Callaghan and Admiral Scott. There was slight consolation in the later realization that losses might have been even heavier had it not been that the enemy ships were carrying bombardment ammunition for use against shore targets, a type of charge not suitable for optimal use against ships.⁷⁸

This unexpected blow to the enemy caused him to turn back the next day, probably for the purpose of reorganizing. During the night of the 14th, however, a number of fast

⁷⁸ *Campaigns USSBS*, pp. 125 and 127.

cruisers, led by *Chokai* approached Guadalcanal from the northwest and subjected the airfield to a bombardment which lasted for about one hour. The badly mauled American ships had been compelled to withdraw to *Espritu Santo*, and the only surface craft available for use against the bombarding force were the motor torpedo boats stationed at Tulagi. Three attacks were launched by this small group, and the enemy cruisers withdrew at 0340.⁷⁹

When, on 12 November, enemy ships had first been seen approaching the island by search-planes, it had been discovered that in addition to the combat craft, a group of supply ships and transports was also in motion in the same direction. On 14 November, at about 0830, these ships were seen again, once more on the move toward Guadalcanal. A short time later they were taken under a preliminary and not too successful attack by two search-planes from the *Enterprise*, recently repaired and operating to the south of Guadalcanal.

Aircraft from the *Enterprise* had been landed on Henderson Field⁸⁰ in order to allow the parent ship to retire beyond danger of air attack. In spite of difficulties arising from lack of equipment on the field, they took an active part in the subsequent action.

The main attack against the approaching transports began at 1300 when 40 Marine Corps planes from Henderson Field found the enemy force in the vicinity of the Russell Islands. The ensuing action was a slaughter. Planes were armed and fueled at the field for the relatively short run to the scene of the engagement, released their bomb-loads, and returned for new supplies. By 1500 planes from the *Enterprise* were making similar sorties, as were Army planes stationed on the field and B-17's from bases outside the island area.

⁷⁹ *Campaigns USSBS*, p. 126.

⁸⁰ This procedure was used several times during the campaign. VF-5, from the *Wasp*, landed on the island on 12 September and served under MAG-23 until 16 October. VF-3 served on the field from 6 September until 14 October, and VT-8 was present from 13 September until 16 November.

By nightfall the transports had been cut to pieces⁸¹. The Japanese escort craft had left the scene early in the engagement and left the transports to their own devices. There was no air cover, and the only limitations upon the possibility of annihilating the force were those of time—(the attacks continued until nightfall)—and the fact, as stated before, that mud and lack of equipment on the field slowed up rearming of planes.

When the engagement was broken off for the night, seven ships—*Shinanogawa*, *Nako*, *Nagara*, *Sado*, *Canberra*, *Brisbane*, and *Arizona*—had been sunk outright or were burning and dead in the water. During the night the remaining four, *Yamazuki*, *Yamamura*, *Kinugawa*, and *Hirogawa*, nevertheless stood in to Guadalcanal, preceded by the reinforced remnants of the covering force which had been turned back on 13 November. In the meanwhile, however, a comparable American group (the battleships *Washington* and *South Dakota*, and four destroyers) had arrived on the scene, and once more there was a heavy surface engagement.

American losses in the engagement were three destroyers—*Benham*, *Preston*, and *Walke* sunk, and the battleship *South Dakota* and the destroyer *Gwin* damaged. Ample vengeance was taken by Rear Admiral W. A. Lee, whose flag was in the *Washington*, for his ship so damaged the *Kirishima* that she was scuttled by her own crew. The enemy destroyer *Ayanami* likewise was sunk. Once again, at considerable cost, an enemy group planning to bombard the Marines' positions had been turned back, its mission uncompleted.⁸²

In the morning, the four surviving transports were seen on the coast to the northwest of the perimeter. Three of them had been beached and the fourth was standing slowly in to shore, burning as she came. All

⁸¹ The eleven transports and cargo ships were later identified as the *Nako*, *Nagara*, *Yamazuki*, *Kinugawa*, *Hirogawa*, *Sado*, *Canberra*, *Brisbane*, *Yamamura*, *Kumagawa*, and *Arizona*, all bearing "Maru" as part of their names.

⁸² *Campaigns USSBS*, pp. 126 and 129.

were immediately taken under fire by the 5-inch batteries of the 3d Defense Battalion—one ship had been beached within range of the shore batteries emplaced near Lunga Point—and by planes. The destroyer *Meade* assisted in the attack. They were destroyed completely, and along the shore adjacent to them great fires were started, indicating that even the relatively small amount of supplies taken ashore was badly damaged or destroyed.

It was estimated that the troops which had embarked upon the ships had been wiped out with the exception of a small and completely disorganized group that succeeded in getting ashore from the beached craft.⁸³

On 3 November, part of the forces engaged in driving to the westward had been withdrawn to the perimeter, and the 2d Marines (less 3d Battalion) were left established in a small beachhead bordering on the shallow bight immediately west of Point Cruz.⁸⁴

To support this position, Battery G, 11th Marines, was in place at the mouth of the Matanikau on the west bank of the river, with Company A, 1st Marines, as security. By this time, Battery F, 244th Coast Artillery, and Battery A (5-inch 51's), 5th Defense Battalion, were in position west of the Lunga, and, with Battery B, 3d Defense Battalion (155mm GPF's) were delivering the first really effective counterbattery fire of the campaign.⁸⁵

As may have been expected, the position, while it was tenable, was open to attack by ground forces and to observed fire from enemy artillery and mortars. High land immediately inland commanded it, although the boundaries of the sector of the 2d Battalion, 2d Marines (the central, or inland sector) itself impinged upon the ridges.

⁸³ *Final Report*, Phase V, p. 33, "Those who escaped represented a band of survivors rather than a military force."

⁸⁴ Letter, Colonel John M. Arthur, to Officer in Charge, Historical Section, Headquarters, U. S. Marine Corps, 11 October 1945, p. 5.

⁸⁵ *Final Report*, Phase V, Annex R, p. 2.

Constant enemy fires were directed upon this area together with several enemy attacks.⁸⁶

Again on 9 November the push to the west was resumed, and once more, as a result of the threat from the northwest, it was halted and the troops were withdrawn,⁸⁷ this time to defensive positions on the east bank of the river—1st Battalion, 8th Marines on beach, 2d Battalion, 8th Marines center, 3d Battalion, 8th Marines inland with refused flank. These positions were maintained until 18 November, when began the preliminary movements in the advance that was to continue, slowly but steadily, until the securing of the island on 9 February.

On 17 November, orders were issued for movement forward of two battalions of the 182d Infantry. On the next day this movement began, the 2d Battalion of that regiment crossing the river on two foot bridges in seven hours,⁸⁸ and the following day saw a comparable move completed by the 1st Battalion. During both these crossings, security was provided by the 8th Marines, who were in position along the ridge flanking the east bank of the river.

On 20 November, the 1st and 3d Battalions, 164th Infantry, likewise crossed to the west and went into position between the two battalions of the 182d Infantry, preparatory to attacking the next day.

The attack of the two regiments was preceded by an intense strafing and artillery preparation, but got off to a slow start and made little progress. On 22 November the following order (quoted in part) was issued by the sector commander, Brigadier General Sebree, AUS:

The Army will dig in its present position. H-hour is 0630 tomorrow morning. The attacking forces will seize the high ground about 1200 yards to the west and organize it for defense. (See Sketch 11 for boundaries, line of departure, artillery barrage, and objective.) Artillery will fire preparation on enemy positions from 0615 to 0630. At 1500 1-182 and

⁸⁶ Letter, Colonel Arthur, 11 October 1945. Major W. R. Williams confirms this. Letter 16 February 1949.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 6. Order for withdrawal came to Colonel Arthur early in the afternoon of 11 November, and the movement began at once.

⁸⁸ *Report of Operations*, 8th Marines, p. 13.

164th will withdraw to a position 300 yards in rear of their night position to get clear of artillery concentration. At 0630 they will advance to their former position where they will be passed through by the 1st and 2d Bns, 8th Marines. The 2d Bn, 182d Infantry will remain in its present position, protect the left flank, maintain contact with the 8th Marines left flank. When the 164th Infantry is passed through by the 8th Marines it will become division reserve. Mortars and artillery will cease fire promptly at 0630, thereafter they will fire only at suitable targets on call from unit commanders.

The comments of the regimental commander, 8th Marines, upon the resultant attack suggest the futility of issuing highly detailed orders with rigid time schedules unless such orders are based upon thorough and accurate knowledge of all factors which may influence execution of the orders.

The Artillery fired as scheduled, but it was about an hour and a half before the 1st and 2d Bns of the 8th Marines had completed passing through the Army units. This resulted from the fact that the movement was cross-corridor, and a ravine had to be traversed that had almost vertical sides, therefore, the shock effects of the heavy artillery fire on the enemy was completely gone by the time the troops had come in contact with the enemy positions.⁹⁰

The extreme forward advance put the American troops in position on a bare ridge, beyond which the enemy was well dug in and in defilade.⁹⁰ Two battalions of the 8th Marines—the 1st and the 2d—were operating between the 1st Battalion, 182d Infantry on the right and the 2d Battalion of the same regiment on the left.⁹¹ The lines extended directly inland from Point Cruz, by no means as far forward as they had been within the past fortnight, and the zone of action of the Marines was across rugged terrain. There was no attempt at an enveloping movement either by the right flank unit, operating along the flat coastal land or by the left flank unit, and there was, accordingly, no opportunity for maneuver on the part of the Marines.

⁹⁰ Major General Pedro A. del Valle, in commenting on the matter in December, 1947, said, "This Army custom of withdrawing prior to our artillery support merely created a vacuum into which the Japs filtered. Thus the next advance had to clear them out all over again."

⁹¹ *Report of Operations*, 8th Marines, p. 15.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 17.

The above account of the action drew from one of the participants the following letter, which is in fact a good small unit action account:

The actions of the 2d Bn, 8th Marines illustrate the futility of this attack as ordered. On 22 November, 2/8, less E Company (in line between 2/182 and 3/164) and H Company (which remained in position on East bank of the Matanikau), commenced an ordered movement across the Matanikau, with information that they would probably pass through the Army. At noon the head of the battalion was in the vicinity of the CP of 2/182. Shortly after 1400, an order for the attack on 23 November was received, stating that 2/8 would pass through 3/164.

Upon receipt of the order, LtCol John H. Cook, Jr., CO of 2/8 went forward to make a personal reconnaissance and indicated an assembly position to which Major Hewitt D. Adams, Exec, was to lead the battalion. During the movement to the assembly position, Major Adams received the complete attack order with the details as shown in General Sebree's order. LtCol Cook rejoined the battalion after dark and issued his attack order to company commanders (E Company commander was not present as they were still in line and would rejoin us on the morning of 23 November). The battalion, in order to get into position to attack, would have to cross a ravine about 100 feet deep and so steep that ropes were needed in going up and down the sides. The crossing would have to be single file. (The bivouac area of 2/8 was less than 300 yards from the front lines).

On the morning of 23 November, the Battalion CP of 2/8 crossed the ravine prior to the artillery bombardment, and upon seeing the time-space factor involved, ordered the movement of the remainder of the battalion to commence immediately.

When the barrage lifted, 3/164 fought its way back to its original positions. About an hour and a half later, Companies F and G, 2/8, were in position to commence the attack. No contact had been established with 1/8 on the right, nor had E Company moved from its former position in the line. It was difficult to press the attack using the rifle companies' 60mm mortars and the 81mm mortars of 3/164 to furnish supporting fires.

The Japanese were well entrenched in defilade, with automatic weapons so sited that the crest of the ridge on which they had their positions was under continuous fire and with a few snipers in the trees overlooking the ridge. No reasonably accurate intelligence of the enemy was available prior to the attack. 3/164 knew only that "there were lots of Japanese there."

The attack finally got under way about 0900 after some mortar preparation. The move was met by an intense volume of fire from the Japanese. G Company could not establish fire superiority and was stopped with no gain. F Company made a small local

penetration of the Japanese positions but could not exploit it. The company commander of E Company was ordered to move his company into position behind F Company, to attack through F Company to exploit that penetration. (It must be realized that the entire battalion was strung out along a ridge backed by a steep ravine about 100 feet deep. No large assembly area was available on the ridge back of the front lines. The Battalion CP of 2/8 and 3/164 was about 75 yards back of the front lines.)

As E Company started to move the Battalion CP and the head of E Company received mortar fire which caused a great deal of disorganization and several casualties. The first shell landed about 10 feet from the spot where LtCol Robert K. Hall, CO of 3/164, LtCol John H. Cook, Jr., CO of 2/8, Maj Hewitt D. Adams, Exec of 2/8 and Capt John E. D. Peacock, Bn 3 of 2/8 were gathered around a map. Both LtCol Hall and Capt Peacock were wounded and had to be evacuated.

About the time that E Company started to move again, word was received by runner that 1/8 on the right had made no advance. Shortly afterward, orders were received from Regimental Headquarters to cease the attack and dig in in the present position.⁶²

The positions as described above were maintained during the next week, with only the defensive activity of the American forces consisting of strong and aggressive patrolling. The 8th Marines units in the sector were relieved, one battalion at a time, on 26 November (1st Battalion), 29 November (2d Battalion) and 1 December (3d Battalion). The regiment thereupon went into defensive positions around the airfield.⁶³

The last week in November saw patrol activity which presaged the pincers movement later used to crush the remaining enemy forces. On 21 November, a patrol consisting of 13 men of the 164th Infantry, two Marine radiomen, two Marine Navajo talkers, and one native police boy, all under the command of 1st Lieutenant Frederick T. Flo, of the 164th Infantry, left Lunga Point by schooner.⁶⁴ Sailing at about 1300, it pro-

⁶² Letter, Colonel Hewitt D. Adams to Commandant, Marine Corps, 4 January 1949.

⁶³ *Report of Operations*, 8th Marines, p. 18.

⁶⁴ All details of this most interesting patrol are taken from a report submitted by Lieutenant Flo on his return to the perimeter. Report can be found in *Patrol Reports*, Guadalcanal Document 1-TTT, enclosure CC, Marine Corps records.

ceeded first to Beaufort Bay, where it met Father de Klerk, from whom it was learned that no Japanese were then between Beaufort Bay and Tiaro Bay.

The patrol then reembarked and sailed to Tiaro Bay, where it disembarked on 22 November. A thorough reconnaissance of the Marovovo, Kamimbo Bay, Aruligo Point, and Visale areas was carried out over the next eight days, and it was learned that while scattered small groups were in the area, no large forces were present. The group returned to Lunga Point at 1700 on 30 November, having established the fact that the remaining enemy forces on the island lay well east of Cape Esperance on the north coast.

Enemy activity took another turn during the closing days of November. I-type submarines, carrying midget submarines for launching in the vicinity of profitable targets, began operating. Midget #10, from parent ship I-16, torpedoed the cargo ship *USS Alchiba*⁶⁵ off Lunga. The last record of such activity is from February, 1945, when an enemy submarine sank the *Serpens*, an ammunition ship, with the loss of almost her entire personnel, at almost the same spot.

A point of minor interest in the late November activities concerns the first recorded mention of war dogs in the Guadalcanal operation.⁶⁶ A memo from Colonel Buckley (D-2, 1st Marine Division) to all infantry units, dated 23 November 1942, advised that dogs and handlers were being sent to them and laid down rules for their employment. No further mention of them can be found in records of the period. Lieutenant Colonel Williams, Commanding Officer, 3d Battalion, 7th Marines, says he was ordered to supply his own handler—"a man who knew something about dogs." The Colonel says further, "The first three nights he (the dog) barked at everything that moved, after that he turned

⁶⁵ *Alchiba* was beached near the mouth of the Ilu. Partially repaired, she took another torpedo, which also failed to finish her. She returned to long and honorable service subsequent to this mishap.

⁶⁶ 1st Marine Division *Miscellaneous Intelligence Reports*, Guadalcanal Document 3-0, enclosure 1.

into the soundest sleeper in the vicinity of the command post."⁹⁷

The last fortnight of November was relatively quiet. Enemy activity ceased, and the Japanese surface forces that had played havoc during October and the first part of November, had withdrawn to the northward to lick their wounds. The principal ground activity was being carried out by the 2d Raider Battalion, which was working its way up the valley of the Tenaru River, overtaking and slaughtering the remnants of force that had escaped from Puller and Hanneken in the actions near Koli Point.

November had been the month of decision in the campaign. No more great attempts to reinforce his troops or retake the island would be launched by the enemy, although he continued to plan for such movements for several weeks. Never again, during the remaining three months of fighting, would he do more than offer bitter resistance to the advancing American forces and attempt, furtively, to supply and evacuate his remaining personnel.⁹⁸

Another aspect of the campaign was drawing to a close. The 1st Marine Division, after having put in four months of constant combat, exposure to enfeebling diseases, and monotonous, if adequate food, was about to be relieved. We have seen how the question of the prompt relief of the amphibious assault troops had been in King's mind from the very beginning of planning for the operation, and how circumstances forbade the carrying out of his concept. General Harmon, (ComGenSoPac) had raised the question obliquely by his insistence early in Sep-

⁹⁷ Letter, Lieutenant Colonel Williams to Commandant, Marine Corps, 17 January 1949.

⁹⁸ One officer — LtCol Puller, wounded at Koli Point — was asked just when he realized that the Marines were winning and that the weight of the fighting was beginning to rest on the enemy. He said that when the news of the successful attacks by the mixed Cactus Air Force began to come in, in the form of fragmentary radio intercepts, as he was lying wounded in the hospital near Lunga Point, and everyone realized that the great enemy convoy was being cut to pieces, he knew that he and the rest of the American force were over the hump. Interview, Col Lewis Puller, January 1946.

tember that reinforcing troops be brought in, and during his conference with Halsey and Vogel in Noumea on 23-25 October, Vandegrift had brought up the subject again.⁹⁹

On 29 November King was able finally to inform Nimitz, Halsey, and MacArthur that Army troops would relieve Vandegrift's men, now badly infected by malaria and showing definite effects of a restricted diet. By dispatch late in the day he told his addressees that a decision had been reached by the Joint Chiefs of Staff to divert the 25th (Army) Division from its Australia destination and send it to Guadalcanal. The 1st Division, when relieved, would go to Australia instead of New Zealand, and would pass to MacArthur's command.

Here again, as during the early stages of the planning, we see evidence that King and Nimitz were willing to anticipate Joint Chiefs of Staff approval. Two days before the sending of the dispatch mentioned above, Admiral Turner had issued his Operation Plan A24-42, which called for the movement to Guadalcanal of troops of the 147th Infantry, the 132d Infantry, the 246th Field Artillery, the 9th Defense Battalion, and other miscellaneous units. By terms of the same plan, the ships bringing the troops were to embark units of the 1st Marine Division for withdrawal from the island.

The air force on Guadalcanal, now striking regularly and with increasing strength at the enemy bases to the northwest, was continuing its involved and tangled administrative character—and no attempt will be made herein to straighten out the matter. On 7 November, General Geiger had returned to the rear area headquarters of the 1st Marine Air Wing, relinquishing command to Brigadier General Louis E. Woods.

The great problem of command of ground troops in amphibious operations, which had plagued Vandegrift from the beginning,

⁹⁹ During the General's three day absence, command of the ground forces on Guadalcanal passed to Geiger, commanding general of the 1st Marine Air Wing. See also notes on Conference 11Nov42, ComSoPac, ComGenSoPac, ComGen 1st MAC.



ON THE WAY OUT, Marines of the 1st Marine Division debark from a transport at Melbourne, Australia. Note M1903 rifles and sprinkling of "Old Marine Corps" field hats.

was at least partially solved in a way that would cause grief to him who would hold to administrative niceties or hierarchical procedure. Late in October and early November, General Holcomb, whom we have seen disagreeing with the ground tactics ideas of naval commanders, visited the area in which his troops were operating. The problem was put to him in bare language by the man best qualified to comment on the matter—Vandegrift. Leaving the island, Holcomb returned to Noumea, where Admiral Halsey's headquarters was still operating. On 3 November, shortly after Holcomb's arrival, Halsey found on his desk for signature a dispatch to King, in which there was set out the flat principle that the amphibious troops commander in a task force should hold rank level with that of the naval task force commander. Halsey read it, and then asked Holcomb whether he agreed with it.

Holcomb studied it carefully, and concurred with it.

Shortly thereafter, he set out for the United States, passing through Pearl Harbor en route. As he paid the customary call

on Nimitz, the Admiral noted that Halsey's dispatch dealt with matters which concerned Holcomb. He handed the message over and asked Holcomb whether he agreed with it.

Holcomb studied it carefully, and concurred with it.

Upon reaching Washington, he was notified that during his absence, a matter of some importance had come up, and King had hesitated to act without Holcomb's having been consulted. The matter was a dispatch from Halsey, and it contained a rather important suggestion about command relationships in naval task forces. It was thought that Holcomb should at least see it and give an opinion on it.

Holcomb studied it carefully, and concurred with it.¹⁰⁰

The relief of the 1st Division had been preceded by an interesting series of letters exchanged between ComSoPac and the Commanding General, I Marine Amphibious Corps. On 10 November the latter wrote

¹⁰⁰ Interview, Lieutenant Colonel Robert D. Heinl, Jr., and General Thomas Holcomb, 12 April 1949.

Admiral Halsey, submitting two alternate plans for the relief, and concluding his letter with the following paragraph:

If progressive landing operations are contemplated, it is of utmost importance that the question of Army occupation after a beachhead has been established by Marine Forces be settled definitely, otherwise our future operations with Marine Forces will be limited to what we can gain and hold with Marine Forces.

To this suggestion Admiral Halsey replied as follows in his letter to General Vogel of 22 November 1942:

. . . It is not practicable at this time to definitely settle the question of promptly relieving amphibious forces after a landing operation. It is a principle that should be followed, but the question is one hinging on the availability of troops and the practicability of the relief under varying situations which cannot be foreseen.¹⁰¹

During the quiescent period that preceded the withdrawal of the 1st Marine Division from the island, the last naval action of the campaign was fought off Tassafaronga, to the west of the perimeter. It was realized that the Japanese were preparing for one more attempt to supply the troops ashore on the western third of the island, and to prevent their doing so, a small United States task force sortied from Espiritu Santo at 2300 on 29 November.

This force, composed of five cruisers and six destroyers, under command of Rear Admiral C. H. Wright, arrived at the area the next day. In the meanwhile, eight enemy destroyers, under Rear Admiral Raizo Tanaka, had sailed from Buin at almost the same time and with the same goal.

Due to bad weather conditions, planes which had been sent to Tulagi by Admiral Wright, for the purpose of search and illumination, could not carry out their mission.

¹⁰¹ *Relief of Marine Force*, Guadalcanal Documents, Marine Corps records.

Contact was first established by radar from the *Minneapolis*, at 2300 on 30 November. Sixteen minutes later the *Fletcher* launched torpedoes at a target about 7000 yards distant. Shortly thereafter the American cruisers opened fire.

The Japanese were taken by surprise, but in spite of that they carried out a skillful maneuver with precision and deadly effect. All destroyers launched torpedoes, executed a turn to port, and withdrew at high speed.¹⁰² Under orders to hold fire unless it was necessary for self defense, they escaped with minor damage to one ship of the formation.¹⁰³ A second Japanese destroyer, operating between the main body and the American cruisers, fired in defiance of orders and was sunk by fire from the cruisers.

The results were serious for the Americans. In spite of having achieved surprise at close range, they succeeded in sinking but one destroyer and inflicting negligible damage to another. On the other hand, one cruiser—the *Northampton*—was sunk, and three—*Minneapolis*, *New Orleans*, and *Pensacola*—were heavily damaged. Of the cruisers, only the *Honolulu*, carrying the flag of Rear Admiral Mahlon S. Tisdale, escaped being struck. No destroyer was damaged.

These events gave point to the remarks made by Admiral Nimitz in a letter to Admiral King.

. . . The enemy is apparently going to continue to expose his forces in the Guadalcanal area. . . . I do not consider that we have yet a superiority in surface forces.

The Jap is our equal in his willingness to fight.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² Tanaka's force made up the Second Destroyer Squadron, and carried 24-inch torpedoes. Robinson ms, p. 12.

¹⁰³ All details of the engagement are taken from *Campaigns, USSBS*, pp. 139 to 141.

¹⁰⁴ Letter, CinCPac to CominCh, 8 December 1942.



THE GUADALCANAL
CAMPAIGN

CHAPTER IX

Final Period—
9 December 1942 to 9 February 1943

RELIEF OF THE 1ST DIVISION

ON 9 DECEMBER, 1942, command of the troops ashore on Guadalcanal passed from General Vandegrift to Major General Alexander M. Patch, AUS,¹ Commanding General of the Americal Division and senior

¹ *Final Report*, Phase V, p. 34. Withdrawal dates taken from Muster Rolls, Headquarters, U. S. Marine Corps.

Army Officer present. On the same day the 1st Marine Division began embarking and moving to Australia for rehabilitation and further training.² The 5th Marines embarked and sailed on 9 December, followed at intervals of a few days by the Division Troops, the 1st Marines, and, after a somewhat longer interval, by the 7th Marines.

² Malaria incidence was estimated at 75%, and time for rehabilitation at three to six months. ComSoPac to ComSoWesPacFor, 10Dec42.



MAJGEN PATCH, USA, receives first-hand briefing from Gen Vandegrift and Col R. H. Jeschke. On 9 December 1942 the task of completing the campaign passed to Gen Patch when the 1st Marine Division was withdrawn from Guadalcanal.



THE ARMY ARRIVES. Commencing in mid-October, Army ground units began to reach Guadalcanal. This picture shows elements of the Americal Division hitting Guadalcanal's beaches in late 1942.

Withdrawal of the 1st Division and the consequent diminution in strength of American forces made it temporarily necessary to leave in abeyance all plans for an immediate resumption of the advance westward. The western sector, therefore, remained quiet for the time being, although active and aggressive patrolling continued toward the west and to the southwest. Conclusion of the long patrol of the 2d Raider Battalion on 4 December had reassured General Vandegrift as to the status of enemy forces to the southward, and it was thought that the remaining enemy resistance would be found in the area lying beyond the Matanikau.

On 9 December, while the transfer of command was taking place, elements of the 164th and 182d Infantry, which were still in position near Point Cruz, were relieved by the 2d Marines (less 3d Battalion), the 8th Marines, and the 132d Infantry, (less 2d Battalion). This relief, undertaken one battalion at a time because of the lack of sufficient reserves, was accomplished by 16 December.³

³ *Report of Operations*, 8th Marines, p. 19.

At the time of completion of this relief, the lines of the sector were as follows: The 8th Marines, with its Weapons Company on the beach in the bight which bounds Point Cruz on the west, had three battalions in line. The 3d Battalion, in position across the narrow coastal plain, was in contact with the 2d Battalion, lines of which ran southward for 1000 yards across broken country, in general following the ridge lines of the grassy hills. This battalion in turn tied in with the 1st Battalion, the line of which, after following a southerly course for some hundreds of yards along the ridge lines, doubled back sharply to the left rear and followed an easterly direction for about five hundred yards.⁴

At that point the regimental sector of the 2d Marines began, and extended eastward across the upper Matanikau and into the grassy reaches which flanked it. The line was irregular in formation, since the Marine regiment and the 132d Infantry, with which it tied in on the left, found it necessary to

⁴ *Ibid.* Aerial photo #14 and sketch #14, pp. 100 and 101 respectively.

take advantage of high ground along the irregular ridge lines.

The sector, which was under the tactical command of Colonel John M. Arthur,⁵ carved out a rough rectangular strip of land enclosing Point Cruz and the mouth of the Matakau, a rectangle the long inland side of which took every possible advantage of terrain. Mount Austen (the Grassy Knoll), which had been an immediate objective of pre-landing planning, directly confronted that portion of the sector held by the 132d Infantry (less 1st Battalion). This terrain feature had been crossed by Marine patrols on several occasions, and there was no indication that it was held in great strength by the enemy.

Of greater tactical importance was a knob, immediately southwest of Mount Austen and distinct from it, known as Hill 27. Used by the Japanese as the anchor of their right flank, it was well prepared and strongly held.⁶

On 19 December, the 132d Infantry was directed by the Sector Commander to take the strategically important Hill 27, still considered to be a menace to the American positions. Preliminary movements of the regiment took it through heavy jungle country of the kind that had caused the disorganization of Japanese troops attacking the inland sector of the perimeter in September and October. On the northern slopes of the hill, while still struggling through heavy jungle, the 3d Battalion, 132d Infantry, ran into unexpectedly heavy resistance and suffered casualties which included the death of the commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel William C. Wright, AUS. In view of this opposition and of the relative inexperience of the troops, the advance was halted and lines were consolidated.⁷

During the next few days preparations were made for a resumption of the attack, and by 27 December the 1st and 3rd battalions

were ready to advance. There was a preparation by artillery⁸ and an air strike, but once more the 3d Battalion ran into heavy opposition. The situation was complicated by the fact that the 1st Battalion, whose mission was to develop a flanking attack from the eastward, had assembled too far west and crowded the lines of the 3d Battalion. Once more heavy casualties were incurred, and once more the advance bogged down.

At the time of the second assault on Hill 27, the American forces in the sector engaged in another offensive, this time with the object of expanding their zone of action to the south and west. This expansion was desirable in order to gain room for maneuver in a projected two-division drive up the coast. Additional troops in the form of the 3d Battalion, 182d Infantry, and the Combat Reconnaissance Squadron, an Army unit and the only cavalry troops used, were made available to the Sector Commander. The expansion was accomplished as planned.

On 30 December, the 2d Battalion, 132d Infantry, was released from division control to the Sector Commander, who thereupon ordered that the attack upon Hill 27 be resumed. Some difficulty was encountered in getting one battalion of the regiment in position for the jumpoff, and the Sector Commander authorized a delay in the attack until 2 January.⁹

The plan¹⁰ for the latest assault upon the hill was an elaboration of tactics used in the second. The 3d Battalion, 132d Infantry, in position immediately below the hill and to the north of it, was to attack forward toward the south. The 1st Battalion, 132d, immediately to its left, was to move southward initially and then swing sharply to the right, against the enemy's right flank. The 2d Bat-

⁵ By 3d Battalion, 10th Marines in direct support. This battalion fired one round of smoke shell every 15 minutes so that the attacking infantry, working through dense jungle, could guide itself.

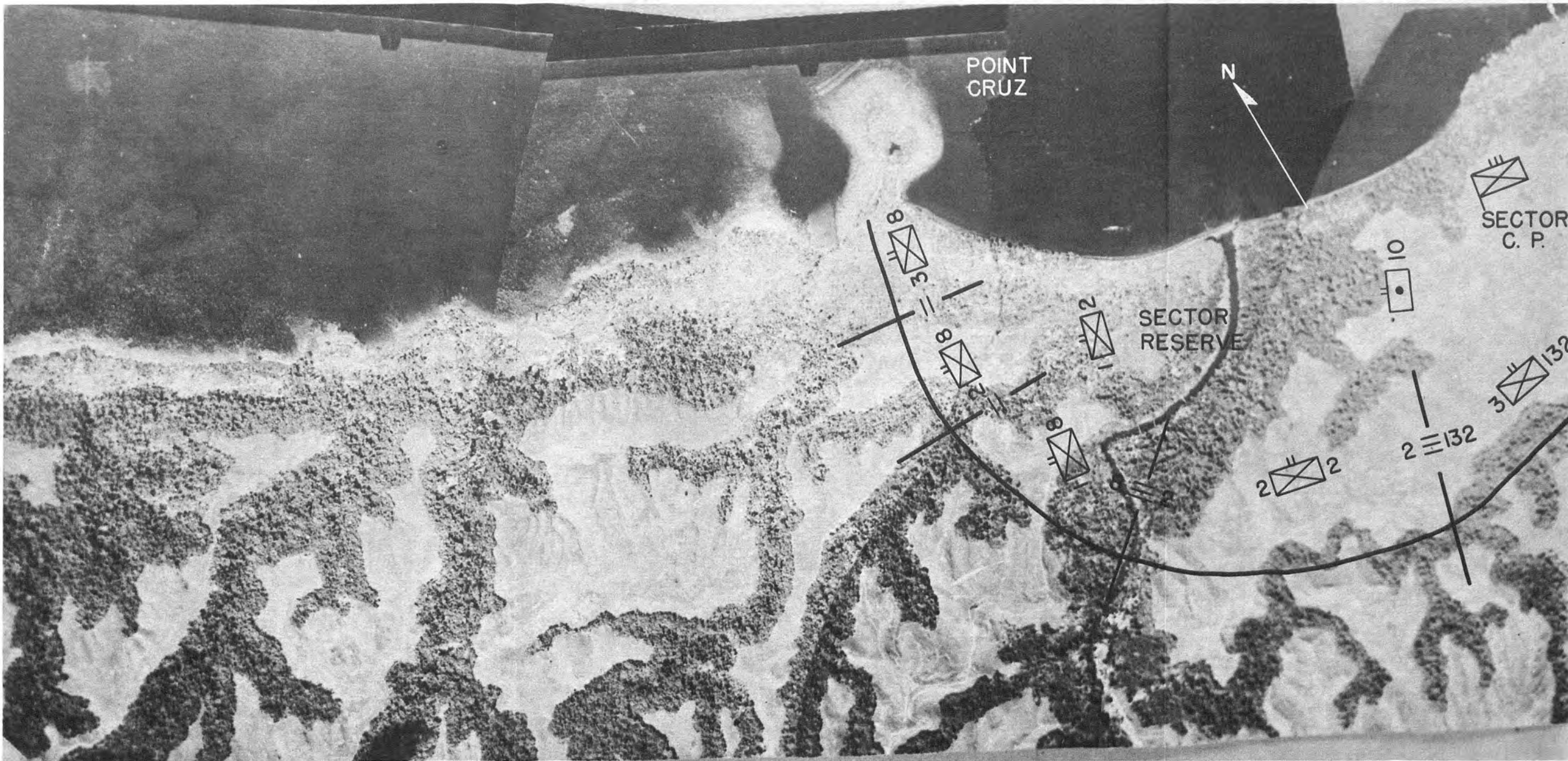
⁶ The hill was separated from Mount Austen by parallel ravines, precipitous and of great depth. The only feasible approach was along a ridge system from the southeast.

¹⁰ Contained in detail in Field Order No. 1, 132d Infantry, 30 December 1942.

² Letter, Colonel Arthur, p. 8. Arthur held under Patch the position Sebree had held under Vandegrift.

³ Interview, LtCol M. L. Curry, 28 January 1949.

⁴ Letter, Colonel Arthur to OinC Historical Division, 11 October 1945, p. 9.



MATANIKAU POSITIONS IN DECEMBER

tion, 132d, meanwhile, in position to the southeast of the center battalion, was to move in a southwesterly direction, swing sharp north when behind the hill, and attack from rear, completing the envelopment.

The movement was well carried out, and the timing allowed a tying in of the three battalions prior to the final drive upon the enemy positions, which was carried through by the 2d Battalion. By late afternoon the heights had been taken, and positions were being consolidated for protection against strong enemy forces on the western slopes of the hill mass.

On 2 January 1943, all ground forces on the island were organized as the XIV Corps, under command of Major General Patch, AUS, who formed his staff from officers already on the island. Included in the command were all Marine Corps units, the Americal Division, and the 25th Division (the 161st Infantry, a component of the latter group, did not arrive on the island until 4 January.) At this time, also, there was a readjustment of the chain of command, after which the Commander, XIV Corps, operated directly under the control of ComSoPac instead of through Admiral Turner. (Commander, Task Force 62) as had been the case up to that time.¹¹

COMING OF THE 2ND DIVISION

On 4 January, the Advance Echelon of the 2nd Marine Division, consisting of the 6th Marines (reinforced) and Division Headquarters, arrived at Kukum and went into bivouac. At 0800, 6 January,¹² Brigadier General A. DeCarre, Assistant Division Commander and commander of the echelon, assumed command of all Marine forces save

¹¹ Information given by BrigGen W. E. Riley in interviews during summer and fall of 1947. Refer to Chapter VII, and Halsey's dispatch of 3Nov42.

¹² *D-3 Log*, 2d Marine Division (hereinafter called *D-3 Log*) entry 0800 of 6 January. The command post, retained throughout the remainder of the campaign, was situated about 800 yards east of the mouth of the Matanikau River, on the beach. This was due north of the ridges upon which Conoley's action had been fought late in October.

aviation on the island,¹³ under command of General Patch, and by 11 January a considerable number of officers and senior NCO's of the newly-arrived regiment had served with the front-line Marine units for purposes of instruction.¹⁴ Next day, the 6th Marines became part of a provisional unit known, for the short time of its existence, as the Composite Army-Marine Division, generally shortened to CAM Division, and on the same day warning orders were received

¹³ The Marine forces in the area on 6 January were as follows:

On Guadalcanal:	Strength
2d Marines (less 3d Battalion) -----	2557
6th Marines -----	4430
8th Marines -----	3605
2d Signal Company -----	239
3d Defense Battalion -----	789
5th Defense Battalion -----	98
9th Defense Battalion -----	1134
10th Marines -----	2716
18th Naval Construction Battalion ----	783
Total, Guadalcanal -----	16351

On Tulagi:	Strength
3d Battalion, 2d Marines -----	739
A Company, 2d Pioneer Battalion ----	174
A Company, 2d Amphibian Tractor Battalion -----	58
A Company, 2d Medical Battalion ----	67
D Company, 2d Medical Battalion ----	44
5" Battery, 3d Defense Battalion ----	47
5th Defense Battalion -----	629
155 MM Battery, 9th Defense Battalion -----	39
3d Barrage Balloon Squadron -----	235
Total, Tulagi -----	2032
Total strength Marine Corps ground forces in area -----	18383

¹⁴ The 6th Marines (Reinforced) consisted of the following units and detachments:

- 6th Marines (Colonel Gilder D. Jackson)
 - 2d Battalion, 10th Marines (Major George R. E. Shell)
 - Company C, 18th Marines
 - Company F, 18th Marines
 - Battery C, 2d Special Weapons Battalion (one platoon)
 - 2d Platoon, Battery A, 2d Special Weapons Battalion
 - An Ordnance Platoon
 - A service and Supply Platoon
 - Company B (Transport) 2d Service Battalion
- Operations*, 6th Marines, dated 10 March 1943.

to be prepared to begin relieving elements of the 2d Marines.¹⁵

The order of relief was as follows: 1st Battalion, 6th Marines, to relieve 1st and 2d Battalions, 2d Marines, not earlier than 30 minutes prior to sunset on 14 January.¹⁶ 2d Battalion, 6th Marines, was to supply one reinforced rifle company for the purpose of allowing Companies A and B, 8th Marines to shorten their line. The 3d Battalion, 6th Marines, was to remain in bivouac.

These movements were accomplished as planned, and on 15 January, more companies of the newly arrived troops were fed into the lines. By 15 January, the 2d Marines, (reinforced), had withdrawn from action and retired to bivouac to await evacuation to New Zealand.¹⁷

This regiment had been in the area for exactly six months when it embarked and on the same day sailed for Wellington. It had accomplished the first landing of the campaign, had taken the most difficult initial objective, and had been longer in the area than any other unit. On 17 January, the 8th Marines, having taken their last assigned objective by 0930, were likewise relieved and went into bivouac. On 18 January the 147th Infantry (less one reinforced battalion) was attached to the 2d Marine Division.¹⁸

Although the three rifle regiments of the 2d Marine Division were now together for the first time since the formation of the division on 1 February 1941, certain circum-

¹⁵ The "Composite Division" merely a convenient term for referring to the group formed by the 8th Marines, the 2d Marines, and the Army regiments that served with them in the early stages of the January drive to the west. The 2d Division Staff served as the CAM Staff. The name first appears in a field order from the XIV Corps (F.O. #2) dated 25 January, at which time the "division" consisted of the 147th Infantry (less one battalion), the 182d Infantry (less one battalion) the 6th Marines, and Marine Corps and Army artillery units. Prior to that date, although the name was used informally, there seems to have been no official acknowledgment that such a unit existed, and the unit itself had no administrative identity.

¹⁶ *Operations*, 6th Marines, p. 1.

¹⁷ Letter, MajGen Leo O. Hermle, 4Jan49.

¹⁸ XIV Corps Operation Memorandum No. 7, 16 January 1943.

stances prevented Major General John Marston, Commanding General of the division, from accompanying his command to combat.

On 28 November, the Commanding General of the I Marine Amphibious Corps, Major General Clayton B. Vogel, had written General Marston from Noumea as follows:

Upon relief of the 1st Division [i.e. by the Americal Division] Vandegrift comes out, and inasmuch as the major portion of troops on duty there will then be Army, it had been arranged prior to my arrival for General Patch, the commander of the Americal, to relieve Vandegrift. (Note. Vogel had arrived in Noumea 28 October 1942.) This having been settled by the powers that be, and in accordance with the general policy that the preponderance of strength, either Army or Marine, will more or less determine the commander, I cannot now change matters. I would have preferred to have sent you up with your staff as the relief of Vandegrift, to have remained in command until such time as all Marines were withdrawn. However, this is now out of the question. Since you are senior to Patch you could not go up there for a permanent stay without being in command.

It will be seen that General Vogel did not explain to General Marston whence the decision on command had come. That it had been made without either the concurrence or the previous knowledge of the Commandant, General Holcomb, is evident from the following extract from Holcomb's letter to Vogel, dated 12 February 1943:

The reasons for the assignment of General Patch to command all forces on [Guadalcanal] are entirely obvious and, I believe, entirely fitting.

However, I consider it most unfortunate that the Division Commander should have been denied the opportunity and experience of commanding his division in its first action; and my feeling is that the Corps Commander should have used every endeavor to afford him that opportunity. There is no reason known to the undersigned . . . why General Marston should not have served under General Patch's command.¹⁹

While the 6th Marines was being fed into the lines and its two companion regiments of the 2d Division were being relieved, a second important shore-to-shore movement

¹⁹ *2d Division Command Guadalcanal Documents*, Marine Corps records. General Marston was never apprised of the Commandant's attitude, either by Vogel or by Holcomb himself. Letter, Marston to CMC, 30Dec48.

was being carried out by a small Army force.

It will be recalled that, during the latter part of November, while the 2d Raider Battalion was working its way along the upper Tenaru and Lunga valleys and while the American positions along the Matanikau were being consolidated, a patrol from the 164th Infantry had conducted an eight-day reconnaissance of the coast line in the neighborhood of Cape Esperance. Only small enemy forces had been encountered, and the negative information brought back by Lieutenant Flo of the Army indicated that the main strength of the enemy was located roughly to the east of Visale on the north coast.

During the early part of January, however, when the final drive up the coast was beginning to get under way, Headquarters XIV Corps decided to place a strong outpost on the south shore of the island to cut off any enemy forces that might retreat overland from the objective areas beyond the Poha River. Company I (reinforced) of the 147th Infantry executed a shore to shore movement from Kukum to Beaufort Bay, completing the trip in one day, 9 January 1943.²⁰ The passage was accomplished without incident, and while approximately one-half the force set up on the south coast near Beaufort Bay, the remainder, working its way back north across the main trail leading to Kokumbona, established a strong point in the hills near Tapinanja. It was felt that any enemy desiring to escape the westward thrust of the American forces might attempt to make their way across the hills toward the south coast. A strong position on the trail would prevent this move.

As matters turned out, no such enemy movement was attempted, and the company made its way overland to Kokumbona after that area had been cleared later in the month. It had had no contact with the enemy.

²⁰ All details of the Beaufort Bay-Tapinanja patrol were obtained from the Historical Division, War Department from Dr. John Miller, Jr., formerly a Marine.

The final stages of the campaign were conditioned by two factors. The first of these was that there were now sufficient troops on the island to make possible a sustained offensive toward the west, an offensive in which it was planned that the forward movement would be constant and that the attacking units would halt only overnight. Furthermore, the number of troops involved—more than two full divisions—was such that enveloping movements were possible.

The second factor mentioned above has to do with the enemy situation. There had been signs (large numbers of dugouts and small emplacements, for instance) that instead of gathering his troops for counteroffensives, the enemy had begun strengthening his positions in the rugged territory west of the Matanikau, apparently for the purpose of fighting a delaying action. It is now known²¹ that a process of withdrawal was going on. A prisoner who was interrogated after the close of the war gave the information that some 13,000 troops had left the island prior to the cessation of hostilities there, although this figure is perhaps an exaggeration.

These things were not known at the time, and all plans were based upon the assumption that the enemy was present in strength

²¹ *Interrogations, USSBS*. Various Interrogations, all with varying estimates of the number evacuated, appear in these volumes. See also the *Robinson ms*, where on page 13 the author gives an account of the operation of the "Express" during January. This task group consisted of from 16 to 20 destroyers, which suffered the following damage during January and February:

- 1 January *Suzukaze* damaged by planes
- 10 January *Hatsukaze* damaged by PT boats from Tulagi. PT's 43 and 112 lost
- 15 January *Tanakaze* and *Urukaze* damaged by planes
- 19 January *Akitsuki*, damaged by submarine
- 29 January Submarine I-1 sunk by New Zealand corvettes *Kiwi* and *Moa* in vicinity of Kamimbo Bay while evacuating enemy troops
- 4 February *Kuroshio*, *Maikaze*, and *Shiranuhi* damaged by planes
- 7 February *Hamakaze* and *Isokaze* damaged by planes

All damage by planes was inflicted by aircraft based on Henderson Field. *Robinson ms*, p. 13.

and capable of counterattack as well as resistance. In this connection, it is interesting to read an extract from the Action Report of Commander in Chief, Pacific Fleet, dated 17 April 1943:

Until almost the last moment, it appeared that the Japanese were attempting a major reinforcement effort. Only skill in keeping their plans disguised and bold celerity in carrying them out enabled the Japanese to withdraw the remnants of the Guadalcanal garrison. Not until after all organized forces had been evacuated on 8 February did we realize the purpose of their air and naval dispositions; otherwise with the strong forces available to us ashore on Guadalcanal and our powerful fleet in the South Pacific, we might have converted the withdrawal into a disastrous rout.

The groups of Japanese destroyers, ranging in number from 16 to 20 ships per group, made the run from the Northern Solomons to Cape Esperance regularly, in spite of punishment taken from Army, Navy, and Marine Corps planes. Attacks by motor torpedo boats disrupted the service to some extent, and air attacks sank several of the destroyers, while at least one fell victim to a hastily-laid mine field, but three trips were made with at least moderate success. The Action Report of CinCPac, mentioned above, is authority for the statement that during January it was estimated that at least 3,000 enemy effectives were present on the island.

PATROL OF THE 132D INFANTRY

The increasing speed with which the combined American forces were rolling back the enemy made it seem likely that a pincers movement, whereby all remaining enemy forces could be caught and wiped out, would be preferable to, and more effective than, a mere pursuit of a withdrawing foe.

Accordingly, the 2d Battalion, 132d Infantry, with reinforcing elements from the Anti-tank Company of the regiment, a portion of the Weapons Company of the 3d Battalion, 132d Infantry, one platoon of riflemen of Company K, 132d Infantry, Battery F, 10th Marines, and communications, engineer, and medical personnel, was moved by boat from Kukum to Verahue, on the south-

western coast of the island.²²² This movement, made on 1 February under destroyer escort, was accomplished without incident by early morning.

During the day, however, a strong enemy air strike developed. Enemy fighter planes, coming in at extreme altitude, drew American planes up in pursuit, and enemy bombers, coming in low over the hills, struck at the airfield and at the congested troop areas around it. One small bridge near Kukum was destroyed, and casualties were inflicted upon Army medical and service troops in the vicinity of the Lunga. After pulling out of their runs, the enemy planes strafed the coastal strip west of the Matanikau, without causing casualties.

The severest loss occasioned by the raid was that of the destroyer *De Haven*. This ship, returning from its mission of covering the movement of the 2d Battalion, 132d, was caught by enemy planes in the stretch of water between Savo Island and Tassafaronga and destroyed in plain sight of the troops engaged along the coast.

Several days were spent by the 2d Battalion, 132d Infantry, in preparing for its push around the cape and down the north coast. During this period the commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel Alexander George, AUS, was wounded and replaced by Lieutenant Colonel George Ferry, AUS. Immediately thereafter, the movement around the cape began which terminated 9 February on the Tenamba River.

THE FINAL DRIVE

The tale of the drive up the coast which carried the American forces into Kokumbona on 23 January, into Tassafaronga on 31 January, and which culminated in the pincer movement which ended on 9 February, can best be told in the form of a chronology, since there were no sharply defined phases in the operation. It was a steady progress of two divisions, with adequate and well

²²² All details of the shore-to-shore movement of the 2d Battalion, 132d Infantry were obtained from the Historical Division, War Department, Dr. John Miller, Jr.

placed artillery support, against an enemy who was exhibiting a trait that was to become an outstanding factor in the rest of the Pacific War—that of bitter, unrelenting resistance, even when the odds against him were overwhelming.

At no time during the last fortnight of the campaign did the American forces come up against a large Japanese force. Momentary halts in the advance were made necessary by the presence of small and determined bands fighting desperate rear guard actions; now and again a pocket of resistance was encountered that halted the progress of a battalion for several hours. Aside from these isolated and uncoordinated bands, however, no enemy forces were found.

It was expected that the Japanese would make some kind of a determined stand in the neighborhood of Cape Esperance, where the terrain, rough and hilly, was ideal for such tactics. Some basis for this belief lay in the fact that all prisoners taken and interrogated during the period spoke of the withdrawal to the northwest of the main bodies. It now seems apparent that the Japanese higher command was keeping knowledge of the evacuation from its lower echelons until they were withdrawn to the neighborhood of Kamimbo Bay, for the stories told by prisoners from widely separated sectors were in agreement with one another and showed no evidence of collusion.

It will bear mention at this time that only once during the course of the campaign was there an instance on record of attempted deception on the part of prisoner.

Late in January a noncommissioned officer was captured after having been wounded, and was taken to the division headquarters, just east of the mouth of the Matanikau River. He answered all questions readily, giving his name and unit and all other information desired. His wounds were then treated in the presence of the language officer, who saw to it that he was fed and comfortable before taking leave. As he was about to walk out of the tent in the stockade, the prisoner called to him, and said he had a confession to make.



INSIDE THE STOCKADE, a cooperative Japanese prisoner is interrogated by Marine intelligence officers.

It seems that the medical care and the food that he had received had made him repentant of having falsified a bit of information. He had given the wrong name, a deception which he corrected at once, with the ingenuous remark, "But that is the only lie that I told."

On one occasion, indeed, a captured sergeant volunteered information which proved to be of great importance. On 25 January the man, a member of a company of engineers, had been captured, fed, and interrogated. At the end of the usual schedule of questions and answers, he offered the information that the next day, or the day after that, there was to be a daylight air raid of some strength on the perimeter. This was interesting, especially in view of the fact that there had been very little of such activity since the early part of December—a consideration which made it seem extremely unlikely that the story was fabrication. The raid developed as had been foretold, and the American planes were in the air and awaiting the enemy blow when seven bombers, accompanied by some forty fighter planes,

arrived. Little damage was done as a result of the alert.²³

In the advance to the westward, the CAM Division and the 25th Division operated abreast, with the former driving up the coast on a front of about fifteen hundred yards and the latter operating inland, in contact on the left. Most of the resistance encountered was found in the ravines opening out into the coastal plain, while the advance of the division operating along the inland sector was held back more by terrain than by enemy action.

On 19 January, the 6th Marines and the 182d Infantry were advancing abreast with the Marine regiment on the right, its right flank on the beach, when a potentially serious situation developed at the point of contact of the right elements of the 182d and the left elements of the 6th, and a delay of one day was occasioned by a resultant miscarriage of plans, but no lasting damage was done.²⁴ On 20 January, the 147th Infantry relieved the 182d Infantry in its zone of action, and the latter regiment went to division reserve, while the 1st Battalion, 6th Marines, relieved the 2d Battalion, of that regiment, which had been operating for eight days across difficult ground and against moderate resistance. Patrolling in the zone of the next projected advance occupied all troops on the 21st.

Resistance developed near the Mamara River in the boundary between the coastal plain and the beginnings of the ridges on 22 January when the 3d Battalion, 6th Marines was pinned down by heavy machine gun and rifle fire after having moved for-

²³ Letter, LtCol Thomas J. Colley to Officer-in-Charge, Historical Division, Headquarters, U. S. Marine Corps, 18 September 1945, p. 3. This air victory was recognized and applauded by General Patch in a memorandum to ComAirCactus, in which he voiced the "profound appreciation of every member of this command. . . ." Quoted by LtGen Francis P. Mulcahy, 28Jan49.

²⁴ *Operations*, 6th Marines, p. 5. See also Statement, LtCol John H. Coffman to CMC, USMC, on subject of completion of report of the Operations Section, Advance Echelon, 2d Marine Division, January 17 to 20, 1943. Guadalcanal Document 1-Q, Marine Corps records.

ward 500 yards.²⁵

The advance of the 1st Battalion, operating across the hills on the left, was held up pending the outcome of the engagement. A comparable situation developed on the next day, when the 3d Battalion once more was pinned down after having gone forward some 500 yards.

On 24 January, resistance centered in the zone of action of the 1st Battalion, on the left of the regimental front, for the progress of that unit was held up until a flanking movement down a ravine, where the main resistance was located, cleaned out the enemy and allowed a resumption of the forward movement. By 1535, contact was established just east of Kokumbona River with elements of the 25th Division which, operating along the inland zone of action, had outstripped the units on the coast, and, swinging northward, had cut across ahead of them, bottling up the remaining enemy forces east of the river.²⁶

For the next six days little resistance was encountered, and the division pushed forward beyond the Mamara River. At 0630 on 30 January, the 147th Infantry passed through the 6th Marines, who thereupon went into bivouac in the area between the Mamara and Kokumbona.²⁷ Security detachments were furnished for the flank and the rear of the 147th Infantry, but Marine participation in infantry action on the island was over.

Organized resistance ceased on 9 February when, as the result of a pincers movement on the part of Army units, the last remaining Japanese forces were pinched out west of the Umasami River. The 6th Marines and the advance echelon of the 2d Marine Division embarked at Kukum on 19 February and returned to the vicinity of Wellington, New Zealand.

²⁵ *Record of Events*, 3d Battalion, 6th Marines, p. 2. *Report of Operations*, 6th Marines, p. 7.

²⁶ *Record of Events*, 3d Battalion, 6th Marines, p. 3. *Report of Operations*, 6th Marines, p. 8.

²⁷ In compliance with XIV Corps Operation Memorandum No. 11, 28 January 1943. The 2d Battalion, 10th Marines was attached to the 147th Infantry, and continued in action.



THE GUADALCANAL CAMPAIGN

CHAPTER X

Conclusions

GUADALCANAL was, in many senses, the Thermopylae of the Pacific War.

In its urgency, its desperation, its hair-thin margins between success and failure, and in its profound effects upon both the U. S. and the Japanese war efforts, it may well rank as one the decisive campaigns of history.

Between August and November of 1942, the seemingly irresistible advance of the Japanese collided head-on with the scanty forces which the United States could throw in their path. By the end of November, the enemy had been halted on the ground, turned back at sea, and virtually driven from the air above Guadalcanal. After 7 August 1942, when U. S. Marines opened the assault, the Japanese never again advanced beyond the Pacific positions which they held at that time. Their succeeding movements throughout the war were always to the rear. This turn of the tide, largely accomplished by the forces of the U. S. Navy and Marine Corps, inflicted at least 27,500 casualties upon the enemy, and cost us 6,111, including 1,752 killed or missing in action.¹ What is more, it gained for the United States a strategic initiative which was never relinquished.

In many respects, Guadalcanal was a victory in relative terms. That is to say, when the Fleet Marine Force was committed to action in the summer of 1942, no-one could pretend that we were fully ready, afloat,

¹ Army and Marine Corps figures only. Navy casualties for the campaign had not been worked out at 29 March 1949.

ashore or in the air, to assume and sustain an offensive of this character. On the other hand, however, as a result of the battle of Midway and their position of extreme extension, the Japanese were less ready, either to meet our resolute thrust or to dislodge our forces, than we were to attempt such a venture. Because of the enemy's unbalanced position, August 1942 was—strategically—a time of now or never. Relatively, the United States was less *unready* for the Guadalcanal campaign than were the Japanese.

Relatively speaking again, the autumn hemorrhage of naval strength between the Japanese and U. S. forces told more heavily against the enemy than against ourselves. Both sides sustained serious losses, but, after the November sea-fights, it was the U. S. Navy which held the balance, slim as it was, and with that balance held the sea, and with that control of the sea, inevitably held ultimately victory.

Examined as a victory of seapower in its broadest sense (which includes all elements of a balanced fleet, be they air, surface, sub-surface or ground), it is apparent that the outcome, and indeed the outset, of Guadalcanal, as a naval campaign, was profoundly influenced by the existence within the U. S. Naval Establishment of the Fleet Marine Force. Organized and trained—as no other U. S. force then was—to act as an amphibious expeditionary component within the Fleet, the FMF was ready, just as it had been a year before, in the occupation of Iceland. The fact that Admiral King had at his

disposal a balanced ready force of the combined arms, including Marine Corps Aviation, enabled the United States to embark without hesitation upon the operation, and at the unique moment. Without the Fleet Marine Force, Guadalcanal would never have taken place.

In considering the fighting on shore, especially as compared to later great battles such as Iwo Jima or Okinawa, it is easy to dismiss the Guadalcanal campaign as a protracted series of small-unit actions, bitterly fought, perhaps, but small. Unless we can weigh the consequences of those actions, this view is perhaps true. We have already seen, however, that the importance of Guadalcanal lay in its character as a turning-point, as the moment when the Japanese drive reversed itself. That, certainly, is how the most astute of the Japanese themselves evaluated it.

Prior to the latter part of 1942, Japan had counted on a relatively easy victory and a war effort which could readily be supported by what was, after all, their rather limited economy. In the Japanese thinking, even the battle of Midway was only a single defeat, a disastrous but temporary setback. Guadalcanal, however, removed the blindfold, and it was only from that time on that the Japanese—too late—set their economic and strategic sights for total war. For example, after the war, Mr. Hoshino Naoki, Chief Secretary of the Tojo Cabinet, stated that the calendar of the Japanese war economy should be dated "After Guadalcanal". As an official U. S. Government appraisal² of the war (based on interrogation of high enemy officials) added,

The entire Guadalcanal campaign lasted from 7 August 1942 to 9 February 1943, but the handwriting on the wall had become plainly visible in mid-November 1942. This date, 11 months after the Pearl Harbor attack, marked the end of the first phase of Japanese economic development in the Pacific war. With November 1942 began the really energetic effort. . . .

At another point, the same source summarizes,

² "The Effects of Strategic Bombing on Japan's War Economy," Over-all Economic Effects Division, U. S. Strategic Bombing Survey, December 1946, p. 19.

At midyear 1942 the Japanese could set the occupation of the southern regions, including Burma and much of New Guinea, against the one major defeat at Midway. *In August the American forces secured a position on Guadalcanal and thereafter the picture changed rapidly. By October-November the decisive engagements for control of Guadalcanal were being fought. . . .* By the end of November, total Japanese merchant shipping was reduced to 5,946,000 tons, or 430,000 tons below the December 1941 and July 1942 level. (Italics supplied)

Not only from an economic point, however, did the Japanese feel the immense impact of Guadalcanal. Fleet Admiral Nagano, Osami, IJN, Supreme Naval Adviser to the Emperor and (from April 1941 to February 1944) Chief of Naval General Staff, was asked, after the war:

Admiral, what would you consider was the turning point from the offensive to the defensive for Japan, and what was that caused by?

After a moment, the Admiral replied,

I look upon the Guadalcanal and Tulagi operations as the turning point from offense to defense, and the cause of our setback there was our inability to increase our forces at the same speed as you did.³

³ Admiral Nagano was interrogated on 20 November 1945 by Rear Admiral R. A. Ofstie, USN, Chief of the Naval Analysis Division, U. S. Strategic Bombing Survey.



GUADALCANAL WAS THE TURNING POINT, and on Guadalcanal the crucial position was Henderson Field, shown here as defending Marine, Navy and Army airmen (and Japanese bombers) knew it from the air.

Captain Toshikazu Ohmae, IJN, one of the foremost of general staff planners of Japan, confirmed this view without hesitation. "After Guadalcanal, in the latter part of 1942, I felt we could not win," he said.

Lieutenant General Kawabe, former Deputy Chief of the Japanese Army General Staff, reached, from the Army's standpoint, virtually the same conclusion, which he expressed as follows:

As for the turning point (of the war), when the positive action ceased or even became negative, it was, I feel, at Guadalcanal.

Not only from those high officers just cited, but from many other such interrogations

of the defeated Japanese, comes this same theme: The theme of Guadalcanal as the turning point. From the slim victories by small forces; from the discipline and ability of Marines to hold on despite hunger, fatigue and disease; from the resolution of U. S. airmen and seamen who were often outnumbered but never outfought; and from the fact that, at this ultimate single point of extension and conflict, the United States, straining its utmost, as against Japan straining its utmost, could exert a few more ounces of effort—from this aggregate came victory, not only on Guadalcanal, but ultimately in the whole Pacific.



THE GUADALCANAL CAMPAIGN

APPENDIX A

Casualties of American and Enemy Forces

THE NUMBER OF casualties suffered by the enemy during the campaign has not been ascertained, and there is no possibility that anything like an accurate figure will ever be reached. The utter demoralization of the enemy forces during the last 60 days of the operation extended to all his activities. With the disorganization of his units the systematic keeping of records ceased. The thoroughness of the destruction caused by the American artillery in the bivouac areas and the command post locations west of Kokumbona during the same period caused the loss even of many of the records that had been kept.

There can be no questioning the fact that the casualties inflicted upon the enemy in every major engagement exceeded by a tremendous margin those suffered by the American forces. The reasons for this favorable balance have been set forth in the account of each engagement and need no recapitulation. It will bear repeating, however, that enemy sources—prisoner of war interrogations and translations of documents picked up in the field—confirmed and in some cases increased the estimates made by the American commanders after each engagement.

The ending of the campaign, when two Army forces met near the Umasami River after having completed a pincers movement, verified what had been suspected during the final few days of the operation—that the frequent visits of a destroyer force to the neighborhood of Kamimbo Bay had been for the purpose of evacuation rather than for reinforcement. The two Army units had met only scattered opposition.

The number of enemy troops evacuated varies from a highly improbable 13,000 offered as an estimate by a prisoner of war under interrogation by the United States Bombing Survey to a more easily credible 7,000, also submitted as an estimate, given in the *Japanese Campaign in the Guadalcanal Area*.

The latter source is the authority for the following tabulation, taken from pages 34 and 35:

ESTIMATE OF JAPANESE LAND FORCES INVOLVED IN THE GUADALCANAL AREA

<i>Unit involved</i>	<i>Number of men</i>
Forces present 7 August.....	2,900
Yokosuka 5th Special Naval Landing Force..	150
Ichiki Unit	1,750
35th Brigade Headquarters and 124th Infantry	3,090
2d Battalion, 4th Infantry	550
Sasebo 5th Special Naval Landing Force....	500
Additional Arrivals prior to October Battle..	19,990
October 25- November 13 arrivals	3,050
November 14 arrivals	3,000
Replacements October-December	2,000
Replacements January	700
<hr/>	
Total	37,680
Evacuations (including 2,100 normally transferred troops)	9,100
<hr/>	
Estimated losses in Japanese land forces on Guadalcanal	28,580

As has been said in the narrative section of this monograph, there was a highly favorable ratio between enemy and American casualty rates. Figures compiled by the Casualty Division Headquarters, U. S. Marine Corps, are as follows:

FIRST MARINE DIVISION

<i>Nature of casualty</i>	<i>Officers</i>	<i>Enlisted</i>	<i>Total</i>
Killed in Action -----	30	644	674
Died of Wounds -----	4	60	64
Missing, Presumed Dead ---	3	33	36
Wounded in Action -----	110	1852	1962
Total -----	147	2589	2736

SECOND MARINE DIVISION

Killed in Action -----	10	212	222
Died of Wounds -----	3	28	31
Missing, Presumed Dead ---	1	14	15
Wounded in Action -----	58	874	932
Total -----	72	1128	1200

THIRD DEFENSE BATTALION

Killed in Action -----	1	6	7
Wounded in Action -----	7	54	61
Total -----	8	60	68

FIFTH DEFENSE BATTALION

Killed in Action -----	0	1	1
Total -----	0	1	1

NINTH DEFENSE BATTALION

<i>Nature of casualty</i>	<i>Officers</i>	<i>Enlisted</i>	<i>Total</i>
Wounded in Action -----	0	2	2
Total -----	0	2	2

FIRST MARINE AIR WING

Killed in Action -----	21	9	30
Died of Wounds -----	1	3	4
Missing, Presumed Dead ---	32	33	65
Wounded in Action -----	37	49	86
Total -----	91	94	185

SECOND MARINE AIR WING

Killed in Action -----	5	15	20
Died of Wounds -----	3	1	4
Missing, Presumed Dead ---	18	11	29
Wounded in Action -----	15	12	27
Total -----	41	39	80

GRAND TOTAL

Killed in Action -----	67	887	954
Died of Wounds -----	11	92	103
Missing, Presumed Dead ---	54	91	145
Wounded in Action -----	227	2843	3070
Total casualties -----	359	3913	4272



THE GUADALCANAL
CAMPAIGN

APPENDIX B

Bibliography and Source Material

THE SOURCES used in compiling the present monograph fall roughly into three categories—official reports and records submitted by the units participating in the actions described, digests of those reports, edited and rewritten for public consumption, and interviews and correspondence with individuals at all levels of command who were presumed to have adequate firsthand knowledge of the events under discussion.

The first and third categories, interacting upon each other, were the most valuable sources of information. The second category, that of the official public release, generally could be depended upon only in matters of chronology, since pressure of time and the exigencies of national security made it impossible for such documents to be anything but extremely vague and general in content.

As has been intimated, the primary documents of the period are uneven in character and in value. Indoctrination in the value of documentary material for the purpose of study had not progressed to the point where there was a complete acceptance of the concept that all aspects of a given operation should be made a matter of record. Also—and this again was mentioned in the prefatory material of this work—the very nature of the early weeks of the operation made the adequate keeping of records almost impossible. There is the further consideration that much of the documentary material of Task Force 62, pertinent to the operation, was kept on board the *McCawley* until she was lost, a year later, in the northern Solomons.

For the initial chapter, which deals with the strategic background of the operation, the correspondence between Admiral Ernest J. King and General George C. Marshall supplies details of the growth of the concept of early attack. This correspondence was made available at the Naval Records and Library. Supplementary material, from the level of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, was secured through the Historical Division, United States Army.

Valuable information was obtained, through correspondence, interviews, and informal discussions with approximately 300 people directly involved in the operations. The notes and correspondence are on file in the records of the Historical Division, U. S. Marine Corps.

The following documents regarding the operation, on file in the records of the Historical Section, were examined in detail and each of them, although it may not have been quoted, contributed to the completion of the work.

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- Final Report on the Guadalcanal Operation Phase III.
- Final Report on the Guadalcanal Operation Phase IV.
- Final Report on the Guadalcanal Operation Phase V.
- D-3 Journal—First Marine Division, August.
- D-3 Journal—First Marine Division, September.
- D-3 Journal—First Marine Division, October.
- D-3 Journal—First Marine Division, November.
- Record of Events of Assistant Division Commander, 21 July–27 September 1942.
- Record of Events of Assistant Division Commander, 28 September 1942–5 January 1943.
- Strength Reports, First Marine Division.
- Station Lists, First Marine Division.

D-3 Log, Second Marine Division.
D-3 Reports, Second Marine Division.
Recommendations and Comments, Second Marine Division 1943.
History of the First Marine Regiment.
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Miscellaneous Reports, Second Marines.
Attack on Gurumbusa and Koilotumaria, First Bn, Second Marines.
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Record of Events, June 26-Dec 9, Fifth Marines.
Record of Events, August, Fifth Marines.
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Record of Events, November, Fifth Marines.
Record of Events, Second Bn, Fifth Marines.
Report of Artillery Observers
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Report of Operations, Jan 4-Feb 19, 1943.
Summary of Operations, First Bn, Seventh Marines.
Report of Operations, November 1-3, Second Bn, Seventh Marines.
Notes on Japanese Attack, September 20, Third Bn, Seventh Marines.
Report of Operation, Eighth Marines.
R-3 Reports, Second Bn, Tenth Marines.
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Report on Tasimboko Raid, September 7-8, First Parachute Bn.
Report of Operations on Gavutu Tanambogo, August 7-9, First Paracuate Bn.
Report of Operation on Lunga Ridge, September 13-14, First Paracate Bn.
Report of Operation, October 7-9, First Raider Bn.
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Report of Operation, Third Defense Bn.
Record of Events, September 25-27, Second Bn, Fifth Marines.
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Preliminary Report, Solomon Islands Operations, CinCPac, Aug 1942.
Action Report, August 6-10, Commander Cruisers, Task Force 18. (Commander Fire Support Group Mike, TF-62).
Action Report, August 6-10, USS *San Juan*.
Solomon Islands Operation. (Series of Reports from individual ships.) Amph Force South Pacific.
Report of Action, Tulagi-Guadalcanal Area, August 7-8-9, Commander TG-62.1 (Cdr Transdivs).
Action Report, August 8, 1942, USS *Henley*.
Action Report, August 8-9. (Report of individual ships on Battle of Savo Island.) Amph Force South Pacific.
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Correspondence, Colonel W. E. Riley.
Marine Corps Movements, 1941-1942.
Command. A folder so captioned dealing with the period in question.
New Zealand. A folder dealing with that country.
Letter. Colonel J. M. Arthur; to OinC Historical Division, 11 Oct 45.
First Marine Division. A folder with correspondence about that unit.
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Operation Plan A18-42. TF-62, 2 October 1942.
Administrative Order 4a-42. First Marine Division, Nov 26, 1942.
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Unit Reports, December 1-January 4, Seventh Marines.
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Operation Plan 2-42, Oct 6 First Marine Division.
Report of Sea Battle off Savo Island. Japanese Document.
Record of Events, 7 August 1942-6 February 1943, Third Bn, Second Marines.
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- Basic plan for the Establishment of the South Pacific Amphibious Force. Date uncertain, but prior to 22 Apr 1942.
- Rough Draft history of First Marine Division.
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- Statement to Commandant by LtCol John H. Coffman. (Incident of argument between Sixth Marines and 182d Infantry.)
- Comments by LtCol Thomas J. Colley, 1945.
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- A four day patrol account by P1/Sgt F. G. Pettus. (In vicinity of Aola.)
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- "Lone Wolf Plan." (Basic plan for establishment of SoPacAm Force.) Admiral E. J. King, 29-Apr42.
- Movement of First Marine Division Fleet Marine Force (memo from Vice CNO to CMC), 24Apr42.
- Finally, liberal use has been made of material in the following published works:
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- The United States Navy at War, Admiral E. J. King.
- Islands of the Pacific, Hawthorne Daniel.
- The Pacific Islands Handbook, R. W. Robson, F.R.G.S.
- The Coastwatchers, Commander Eric A. Feldt.
- The Lost War, Matsuo Kato.
- The Island War, Frank O. Hough.
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THE GUADALCANAL CAMPAIGN

APPENDIX C

Native Help During the Guadalcanal Campaign

THE NATIVES of Guadalcanal and the vicinity, operating as members of the native constabulary, as laborers, or as scouts and assistants to the coast-watchers, rendered invaluable aid to the American forces. The constabulary was composed of men chosen and trained by the British for law enforcement purposes. It consisted generally of men from other parts of the island or from different islands of the group. This may have been conscious policy on the part of the British, followed to prevent the intrusion of family or clan loyalty in matters of official nature. The fact that the native police came from areas far from those in which they operated made it necessary for them to employ pidgin English when speaking to the local inhabitants. The compiler of this monograph noted the additional fact that the local British officers used this minimal speech even when speaking to constables who had an excellent command of colloquial English.

The first contact, according to Colonel E. J. Buckley, with the indigenes was made about 11th August when Sergeant Major Vouza appeared in the perimeter. This individual, who was a native of the vicinity of Tetere, had been in the constabulary for twenty-five years and had retired from the service in April of 1941. The coming of the Japanese and the subsequent activities of Captain Martin Clemens had indicated to him that he might be of service, and he put himself at the disposal of the Marines.

He proved to be a valuable assistant. His years in the constabulary had given him an

intimate knowledge of the terrain of the island—something that the average native lacks because of having no incentive to travel and because of the linguistic difficulties involved in travelling—as well as a high reputation among the natives of the coastal plains and the foothills. He was a courageous man and he had a sense of duty and responsibility in the European meaning of the terms.

He was one of the authentic heroes of the campaign, one of those who, by his own personal courage and integrity, stood out above his fellows. The Japanese, under the coaching of one Ishimoto, an obscure but obnoxious individual who had resided for some time at Tulagi prior to the outbreak of the war, captured Vouza one day in a native village about twenty miles from the perimeter. The old man refused to give them information about his American friends, and after binding him to a stake they went to work on him with swords, stabbing him in the chest and the throat. He still refused to talk, and they left him for dead—as indeed he should have been, for in addition to the wounding he had been kept almost a full day in the sun, without water.

He succeeded in slipping his bonds, however, and in making his way to the perimeter, where he was put in the hospital and acclaimed as a hero. For this exploit he was given the U. S. Silver Star Medal and the British George Medal.

Afterwards, when Vouza was asked what he thought about his experience, he replied, "I remember my training in the Police, and

how they tell me always to be faithful to my King. I think about how naughty I was when I first joined the Police and how much trouble I cause Government. So I tell myself this time I do something good for my King to pay him back for all that trouble. . . ." (*Among Those Present*, p. 29. His Majesty's Stationery Office, London, England, 1946.)

Native labor was employed through the efforts of Commander Widdy, an old inhabitant of the island and a former employee of one of the great soap companies. A large portion of the natives so used were brought from Malaita, an island with a reputation for warfare and intransigence, although many of them came from the Nggela group, of which Florida is a part. The natives so employed were paid in cash and fed—there is reason to believe that the rate of pay was higher than that given by the British plantation and that the procedure was looked upon by the British with something approaching dismay.

Such labor was used in and around the supply dumps and for the handling of material being unloaded from cargo craft. No records can be found of the number so employed, but the total ran high into the hundreds.

There was little evidence that any of the local people were disaffected. One case arose in which the division staff was warned by a coastwatcher to avoid dealing with a certain man who had been working for the enemy, but aside from that isolated instance, the records tell only of willing and loyal assistance from the local inhabitants.

The native constables and scouts had as their primary mission the gathering of intelligence data and were given to understand that combat was to be avoided when possible. The report of Saku, a scout operating in the vicinity of Sunahavi, is incorporated in the body of the narrative. This report gives a clear picture of the type of activities in which the native scouts indulged.

The Japanese attitude toward the natives of the island was one more outstanding example of the enemy's utter lack of intelligence. The compiler of this monograph met

a young and well educated native on about 7 January 1943. Beli had been educated in mission school and spoke and wrote English with some facility. He came from the neighborhood of Cape Esperance, and he had had first hand experience with the Japanese. He said that one small thing had incurred the wrath of his fellow Melanesians perhaps more than any other one item.

The problem of establishing and maintaining a garden anywhere on the island is a tremendous job for the native, with his few and primitive tools. The great trees of the jungle have to be girdled and killed—itsself a long process—and when they are thoroughly dried they are felled, generally by burning. The small limbs are then removed and used, and the larger ones and the trunks are likewise burned *in situ*. It is then possible to begin the actual gardening, sometimes more than a year after the process is begun.

When the garden finally begins producing, therefore, it is the object of much solicitous care and is regarded as a valuable, if not an indispensable, possession. The produce is used with discretion and with a minimum of waste. When the first Japanese arrived, carrying the minimal rations that had been issued them, they sought out eagerly the fresh fruit and vegetables of the native plots. Instead, however, of taking only what could be eaten at once in order to conserve the rest, they followed the indefensible practice of ripping up an entire vine for the sake of getting one tomato and of cutting down a banana or a papaya tree to obtain one piece of fruit.

This deliberate and obtuse ignoring of all the tenets of primitive economy and common sense did more to alienate the natives, according to Beli, than did the subsequent enforced labor and heavy taxation that the enemy attempted to impose. He is likewise the authority for the information that this alienation had begun to take place even before the coming of the Americans, and that as a result of it, the natives fell upon small groups of the enemy as they fled the perimeter on the day of the landings and wiped them out. Similar tactics were used against

straggling bands after each of the great attacks upon the perimeter. It is probable, although it cannot be supported by documentary evidence, that a large number of casualties occurred among the Japanese as a result of the activities of an angry and essentially warlike people.

There is one piece of documentary evidence, however, that tells without possibility of error of the stupidity of the Japanese attitude toward the native people. It is contained in section L, Folder 3HH, Guadalcanal documents, in the Historical Division of the U. S. Marine Corps, and consists of an extract taken from a translated enemy document that is not further identified.

(Items of Interest.) 1. Also, if you discover natives, it is necessary to shoot them at once.

By the end of the year, it was apparent that all natives had left those sections of the island under Japanese control—the area lying between the Bonegi River and Beaufort Bay, roughly. This statement is made on the basis of the fact that prisoners taken during January by the 6th Marines had not seen any natives prior to being taken behind the American lines. It is interesting to note that in some cases those prisoners were men who had been on the island for several months, which may indicate that the indigenes had withdrawn from the infested areas even before the end of the year.

The American forces carried out the practice of paying adequately for the help that the natives rendered. It developed at once that the American and the British definitions of the term “adequately” differed widely and fundamentally. The British, in-

cluding Commander Widdy, considered that the American authorities were overpaying and “spoiling” the natives. It is undoubtedly true that the natives for a time after the withdrawal of the American forces will be a little reluctant to resume their former low pay status. They will also miss the chance to purchase a variety of small items that the post exchanges made available to them during the American occupation.

Beginning in 1947, news items originating in Australia began to tell of native unrest in the islands to the north of that continent. In New Guinea there began to grow up a strange cult—designated by students of primitive sociology as the *cargo cult*—whose adherents believed that the great ships, bearing great varieties of food and tobacco and tools, some day would appear again over the horizon. Farther away, in Malaita and in the great copra groves of the neighboring islands, the native laborers showed themselves reluctant to resume their pre-war status in the matters of term of employment and compensation. There were near approaches to violence in the neighborhood of Point Cruz, where far too much blood had been shed already, and on Malaita itself, always cool toward any attempt at intrusion, the natives refused to allow any ship to tarry at the island.

At the time of the completion of this monograph, in the summer of 1949, copra production on the great island plantations was at a standstill, awaiting the settlement of demands by potential laborers for an increase of approximately 400 per cent in wages and more adequate and varied supplies of imported food.



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APPENDIX D

Medical Experience

THE FACTUAL information contained in this appendix is taken from the medical and dental annexes to the *DIVISION COMMANDER'S FINAL REPORT ON GUADALCANAL OPERATION* and from observations contained in that report itself.

The entire Division had been reviewed from a medical standpoint prior to departure from the United States. All individuals not physically qualified for tropical duty, because of infirmities or actual physical handicap, were declared unfit for foreign service. All hands were thoroughly immunized against smallpox, yellow fever, and typhoid fever, and all received injections of tetanus toxoid.

Living conditions in New Zealand—under canvas in extremely bad weather—caused a number of upper respiratory infections. Contributing to this was the recent 29 day trip (for the First Echelon) under crowded transport conditions.

The Second Echelon, in part, was embarked on S. S. *Ericsson*. Food conditions for the Marine Corps passengers were bad. Insufficient food had been embarked, and men were given only two meals per day, with a total calory content of less than 1500. Individuals lost from 16 to 23 pounds during the trip. The use of oil substitutes in place of proper shortening caused a minor epidemic of intestinal disorder. There had been an attempt to reload rancid butter and condemned eggs for use of the troops, but it was defeated by a strong protest lodged by Marine Corps officers. (Other references to the

same conditions appear elsewhere in documents, but they differ in no detail from the above and hence are not quoted.)

The lack of proper opportunity for men to get in condition after their sojourn aboard ship is mentioned. "When the Division sailed on July 22, about half of its number had had continuous billets aboard crowded transports for one month and the other half had lived aboard ship for seven of the previous nine weeks without opportunity for any physical conditioning."

Medical supplies and medical battalion personnel were landed between 1030 and 1100 on D-day—from two to three hours after the assault landings. No field hospitals or collecting stations were set up during the first twenty-four hours. Operation orders had called for evacuation via the beach of all casualties and their removal to ships as long as ships were in the vicinity. This transfer was supervised and coordinated by the Division Surgeon and the Transport Group Surgeon. Medical supplies seem to have been reloaded aboard ship at Fiji without the sanction or the knowledge of the Division Surgeon, and placed in the lower holds of the ships. This occasioned a delay in landing a good share of such supplies and in the loss of a good bit more when the transports withdrew. All supplies of E Company, 1st Medical Battalion were lost aboard the *Elliott*, but the company was reoutfitted without trouble by other units.

Troops and medical personnel were attempting to carry too much equipment. Ex-

cessive salt loss through perspiration caused much discomfort and supply of salt tablets carried by medical personnel was inadequate.

Casualties suffered at Gavutu-Tanambogo were treated at aid stations and removed to ships.

By August 10th, 1942, a functioning field hospital was set up by B Company in a wooden building northeast of the airfield. Tent hospital was set up 500 yards to the east of the building and was operated by E Company. Foxholes and other protective positions were prepared and valuable medical supplies were placed underground. Supplies not so protected were disposed in two dumps about one mile apart. Each of these dumps or depots was again divided into small quantities and dispersed over the area, protected by canvas. Valuables such as quinine, atabrine, and the sulfonamides were placed in dugouts for safety.

Sanitation was a tremendous problem and was complicated by the fact that the retreating Japanese had left quantities of food so scattered about in the area that it was difficult or impossible to dispose of it. Fly-proof latrines were constructed at once.

Water was purified by stock chlorination solutions for the first 5 days, the water itself being taken from the Lunga River, a swift-flowing stream. On August 12th, a purification unit was set up on the banks of the Lunga. It was possible to make 12,000 gallons of potable water per day with a chlorine content of 1 to 1.5 parts per million. (Rated capacity of the unit was 6,000 gallons.)

Casualties within the perimeter from air strikes and surface craft bombardments were treated on the site. Corpsmen accompanied all small patrols, while those of over two-company strength were accompanied by a medical officer.

Prior to the attack on the perimeter by the Ichiki unit, 262 casualties were treated at the Division Hospital or by E or A Medical Companies. Two of these were evacuated by air, although regular evacuation by that means did not begin properly until Septem-

ber 3d, 1942. A small hospital was set up near the Ilu for the treatment of prisoners of war, who numbered at one time twenty-eight under treatment.

Transportation of wounded was taken care of by ambulance, of which six were landed during the initial period, and by Higgins boats in the cases where actions occurred away from the perimeter and close to the beaches.

A moderate amount of gastro-enteritis began to appear in the period following 20 August 1942. It caused one death, but was brought under control within three weeks, probably as a result of improvement in camp sanitation. Exact bacteriology was not determined because of lack of proper equipment for study. During the course of the illness, many men were made ineffective from its debilitating effects. Five cases of amoebic dysentery were found and evacuated at once, and two cases were reported to have been of the Flexner Strong type of bacillary dysentery.

Malaria did not appear clinically until the third week in August although there had been cases of catarrhal fever and another fever resembling dengue. From the time of the appearance of four cases of malaria during the period 14-21 August, that disease became an increasingly grave problem. Suppressing treatment in the form of one and one-half grains of atabrine twice daily, given on two days per week, was begun on order dated 10 September 1942. The annex notes that it was impossible to get complete cooperation from either officers or men in the matter of taking this preventive course. Tablets were distributed with food, and large numbers of them were found where they had been thrown by the men to whom they were given. Quinine was used as a suppressive only in the rare case where atabrine could not be tolerated by the man.

Solar radiation began to be a problem when activities of the perimeter were extended to the bare, grassy ridges of the foothills. Transportation of water (by five-gallon cans, manhandled to the troops in position on the ridges) was difficult and salt loss

through excessive perspiration was serious. (See remarks above on this same detail.) A few cases of personal intolerance to sunlight were noted, generally involving blond men with bright red hair. These intolerants were transferred to organizations where they would not be exposed unduly to direct radiation.

A method was evolved and followed for the treatment of casualties suffered during inland actions. These were treated at forward aid stations, and evacuated along the axis of communication by whatever means were at hand. This took the various forms of transportation by jeep, by ammunition carrier, by prime mover, or by hand (stretcher). As has been noted above, in those actions which took place near the beaches, ramp boats were used with great success between the scene of the actions and Kukum, whence the wounded were transported to the hospital by ambulance. Coordination was through the regimental medical officer in all cases. The collecting sections of the medical companies were not used as such, but were employed as bearers. Jeeps were sent into areas well forward of the ambulances that were used.

All wounds were treated without the use of iodine. Front line treatment consisted of the application of sulfanilimide powder to the wound and the administration of sulfathiazol by mouth in amounts of from thirty to sixty grains. A dry dressing was then applied. Exceptions to this treatment was abdominal wounds, which were treated without the use of any orally administered medicaments. Morphine and tetanus booster shots were given where indicated. Time elapsing between wounding and hospitalization rarely exceeded two hours. (Compiler's note. Hospitalization here must mean aid station treatment, for under optimal conditions the wounded could not have been returned from the upper Matanikau, for instance, to the perimeter within the time quoted herein.)

Malaria became the greatest single medical problem after the subsiding of the gastro intestinal outbreak and the occurrence of

catarrhal fever and dengue. One death was reported from cerebral malaria, but in general the infection was benign tertian.

Fungus infection of the feet, the groin, and the ear assumed minor importance. The conclusion was reached that there was an insufficient supply of socks and the source quoted recommended that they have a high place on future priority lists.

A curious fact is noted with regard to the matter of intestinal infection. It will be recalled that after the first few weeks, such infection had subsided entirely on Guadalcanal. One of the battalions which had taken part in the Tulagi action arrived in Guadalcanal after the outbreak was over, entirely free from that type of infection. Two weeks after its arrival, it was suffering from approximately the same percentage of cases of the same ailment as had been noticed during the first outbreak on Guadalcanal.

SUMMARY OF MEDICAL ACTIVITIES

Number of men on the island increased, during the fifth phase of the operation, to approximately 45,000 men, and medical supplies and service for the entire group were the responsibility of the Division Medical Officer.

Food situation at opening of the operation was very bad. "Captured enemy supplies were the difference between a starvation diet and one well above that point in calory value during the early phases." Food approaching the state where it normally would have been condemned was eaten without apparent ill effects. "At no time was there any evidence of disability caused by food during the entire operation."

During the period 18 September-9 December, the disease incidence rose sharply. "Medical diseases, particularly in the form of malaria, reached alarming proportions in the latter part of this phase." The Medical Annex contains a table of admissions of First Division personnel only, excluding admissions from Second Division units and from Aviation and Army organizations. The

figures, even though they are incomplete, in a sense, give a valuable picture.

Total for August	900
Total 1-18 September	907
Total 18 September-1 October.....	817
Total October	2630
Total November	2413
Total 1 December-10 December....	913

	8580

Psycho-neurosis and the various war neuroses have attained such wide spread publicity of late months that the entire remarks of the Medical Annex may be of interest.

The psychoneuroses and war neuroses were evacuated at once if severe. The relative small number of these, when compared to other groups, is an indication of excellent mental stability among the officers and men of the First Marine Division. Two groups of this type of case were treated on the island by a few days rest in the sick bay area until the acute symptoms had subsided and then they were transferred to the Quartermaster and used as a labor unit. A very few severe cases from among these groups were evacuated. It is the feeling of the medical officers who were in charge of these groups that the results were excellent. Approximately seventy-five men were so treated and made available for useful and necessary labor, which in turn released an equal number of men for front line combat duty.

Malaria, benign and malignant tertian, was the greatest single medical problem and continued to be so for both the 1st and 2d Divisions for some months after these units had left the island. The 2d Division, in fact, suffered more heavily after leaving than it did on the island, for its stay was very little longer than the incubation period. (An exception must be made in the case of the 2d and the 8th Marines. These suffered under the same conditions as did the 1st Division units.)

Only three deaths from malaria occurred on the island. Many cases had to be evacuated, but most of the men who turned in were returned to duty. The Annex sets forth the theory that the introduction of large numbers of natives as laborers into the perimeter may have contributed to the high rate of infection. (See Appendix on Native Help, a part of this monograph.) Surgeons of the 2d Division later ascribed the high

rate of incidence in that organization to the fact that the advance was over ground that had long been held by highly infected enemy personnel.

The 1st Division moved from Guadalcanal to Australia, where it came under the aegis of the Commander Southwest Pacific. Camp areas had been assigned the division in the neighborhood of Brisbane, the conditions of which impelled General Vandegrift to write as follows:

After two weeks of camp — particularly with the rains coming down and the weather getting hotter — the mosquitoes came in droves. They are really so bad it is almost unbearable in the camp area. In addition to the pesty mosquitoes, a large number of them are the malaria bearing kind. This was a surprise to us and I really believe a surprise to the Army. . . . Fortunately for us, the Director of Public Health Service for the state of Queensland had written a letter to the Base Commander drawing attention to the fact that there were a tremendous number of malaria carrying mosquitoes present, and to have large numbers of men from malaria countries would be a menace to the civilian population. . . . Our hospitalization for malaria increased 249 in twenty-four hours. We now have over 500 in the hospital here with malaria. . . . (Letter, A. A. Vandegrift to General Holcomb, 26 December 1942.)

As a result of the protests implied in the General's letter, the division was finally based near Melbourne, far to the south and outside the anopheles belt.

The story of evacuation of casualties from Guadalcanal is an interesting one. "Occasionally the transfer of patients from hospital to plane was done while the airfield was actually under artillery fire." Up to 1 December 1942 a total of "2879 patients were evacuated by air without any additional casualties." This evacuation reached its peak in November, when 1582 patients were sent out. In one seven day period 485 patients left the island by plane.

Here follows a tabulation of such evacuations by month:

August	2
September	321
October	974
November	1582

Total evacuated by air	2879
Total evacuated by sea	1040

Total evacuations	3919

The planes used in these operations were transport planes that could accommodate eighteen stretcher or 36 sitting or ambulant cases. The method was preferable to trans-

portation by sea because of the smaller amount of handling necessary for stretcher cases, and because of the more speedy arrival of the patients at rear area hospitals.



THE GUADALCANAL
CAMPAIGN

APPENDIX E

Marine Corps Station List

FIRST MARINE DIVISION

7 AUGUST 1942-9 FEBRUARY 1943

Commanding General—MajGen Alexander
A. Vandegrift.

Asst Division Comander—BrigGen William
A. Rupertus.

Chief of Staff—

Col W. Capers James
(to 24 Sept)

Col Gerald C. Thomas

D-1—Col Robert C. Kilmartin, Jr.

D-2—

LtCol Frank B. Goettge
(to 12 Aug)

LtCol Edmund J. Buckley

D-3—

Col Gerald C. Thomas
(to 24 Sept)

LtCol Merrill B. Twining

D-4—LtCol Randolph McC. Pate

First Amphibian Tractor Battalion

Commanding Officer—LtCol Walter W. Barr

Executive Officer—

Maj Halstead Ellison
(to 13 Nov)

Maj Francis W. Cooper

Bn-3—(Not shown in records).

First Engineer Battalion

Commanding Officer—

Maj James G. Frazer
(to 25 Oct)

Maj Henry H. Crockett

Executive Officer—

Maj Henry H. Crockett
(to 25 Oct)

Maj Levi W. Smith, Jr.

Bn-3—

Capt Walter R. Lytz
(to 26 Sept)

Maj Levi W. Smith, Jr.
(to 25 Oct)

Maj John P. McGuinness
(from 15 Nov)

First Medical Battalion

Commanding Officer—

Comdr Don S. Knowlton

First Parachute Battalion

Commanding Officer—

Maj Robert H. Williams
(from 27 Sept)

Maj Charles A. Miller
(to 18 Sept)

Capt Harry Torgerson
(18-26 Sept)

Executive Officer—

Maj Charles A. Miller
(to 7 Aug)

Capt Harry L. Torgerson
(to 18 Sept)

Capt Justin G. Duryea

Bn-3—

Capt George R. Stallings

First Pioneer Battalion

Commanding Officer—

Col George R. Rowan
(to 20 Sept)

Maj Robert G. Ballance

Executive Officer—
Maj Robert G. Ballance
(to 20 Sept)
Maj Alonzo D. Gorham
Bn-3—
Capt Warren S. Sivertsen

First Service Battalion

Commanding Officer—
LtCol Hawley C. Waterman

First Special Weapons Battalion

Commanding Officer—
Maj Robert B. Luckey
(to 16 Oct)
Maj Richard W. Wallace
(promoted to Major in interm)
Executive Officer—
Capt Richard W. Wallace

First Tank Battalion

Fwd Ech,
Commanding Officer—
Maj Harvey S. Walseth

First Marines

Commanding Officer—
Col Clifton B. Cates
Executive Officer—
LtCol Julian N. Frisbie
(to 23 Sept)
LtCol Edwin A. Pollock
R-1—
Capt Elmer W. Myers
R-2—
2dLt George P. Hunt
R-3—
LtCol William W. Stickney
(to 23 Sept)
R-4—
Capt Charles L. Cogswell
Capt Francis W. Eagan

First Battalion, First Marines

Commanding Officer—
LtCol Lenard B. Cresswell
Executive Officer—
Maj Marion A. Fawcett

Bn-3—
2dLt Donald K. Dayton

Second Battalion, First Marines

Commanding Officer—
LtCol Edwin A. Pollock
(to 23 Sept)
LtCol William W. Stickney
Executive Officer—
Maj William Chalfant, III
(to 2 Oct)
Maj Charles L. Cogswell
Bn-3—
2dLt Arthur W. Larson

Third Battalion, First Marines

Commanding Officer—
LtCol William N. McKelvy, Jr.
Executive Officer—
Maj Walker A. Reaves
(to 23 Sept)
Bn-3—
Capt Alexander R. Benson

Fifth Marines

Commanding Officer—
Col Leroy P. Hunt
(to 21 Sept)
Col Merritt A. Edson
Executive Officer—
Col William J. Whaling
(to 25 Sept)
LtCol Walker A. Reaves
(to 12 Oct)
LtCol William S. Fellers
R-1—
Capt Donald L. Dickson
(to 22 Nov)
Capt Robert D. Shine
R-2—
Capt Wilfred H. Ringer, Jr.
(to 12 Aug)
Capt Henry J. Adams
R-3—
Maj William I. Phipps
(to 24 Sept)
Maj Lewis W. Walt
(to 12 Oct)
LtCol Walker A. Reaves

R-4—

2dLt William L. Williams

First Battalion, Fifth Marines

Commanding Officer—

LtCol William E. Maxwell

(to 30 Aug)

Maj Donald W. Fuller

(to 13 Oct)

Maj William K. Enright

Executive Officer—

Maj Milton V. O'Connell

(to 30 Aug)

Maj William F. Thyson, Jr.

(from 19 Sept)

Bn-3—

Capt Gordon D. Gayle

Second Battalion, Fifth Marines

Commanding Officer—

LtCol Harold E. Rosecrans

(to 11 Sept)

Capt Joseph J. Dudkowski

(12-17, 25-30 Sept)

LtCol Walker Reaves

(18-24 Sept)

Maj David S. McDougal

(1-8 Oct)

Maj William J. Piper

(8-11 Oct)

Maj Lewis W. Walt

Executive Officer—

Maj Donald W. Fuller

(to 30 Aug)

Maj George T. Skinner

(to 11 Sept)

Maj William J. Piper, Jr.

(from 1 Oct)

Bn-3—

Capt Joseph J. Dudkowski

(to 14 Oct)

Capt Harry S. Connor

Third Battalion, Fifth Marines

Commanding Officer—

LtCol Frederick C. Biebush

(to 22 Sept)

Maj Robert O. Bowen

Executive Officer—

Maj Robert O. Bowen

(to 22 Sept)

Maj William H. Barba

(from 25 Sept)

Bn-3—

Capt William F. Thyson, Jr.

(to 18 Sept)

Capt Lyman D. Spurlock

Seventh Marines

Commanding Officer—

Col James W. Webb

(to 20 Sept)

Col Amor LeR Sims

Executive Officer—

Col Amor LeR Sims

(to 20 Sept)

LtCol Julian Frisbie

R-1—

Maj Harold G. Walker

(to 24 Sept)

Capt Theodore G. Bateman, Jr.

(to 3 Nov)

Capt John S. Day

R-2—

Capt Carl L. Peed

(to 1 Oct)

Capt Claude B. Cross

R-3—

LtCol William R. Williams

(to 25 Sept)

Capt William J. King

R-4—

Maj Frederick L. Wieseman

First Battalion, Seventh Marines

Commanding Officer—

LtCol Lewis B. Puller

Executive Officer—

Maj Otho L. Rogers

(to 27 Sept)

Maj John E. Weber

Bn-3—

Capt Charles J. Beasley

Second Battalion, Seventh Marines

Commanding Officer—

LtCol Herman H. Hanneken

Executive Officer—
Maj Odell M. Conoley
Bn-3—
Capt Arthur R. Sherwood

Third Battalion, Seventh Marines

Commanding Officer—
LtCol Edwin J. Farrell
(to 24 Sept)
LtCol William R. Williams
Executive Officer—
Maj Burdette Hagerman
(to 24 Sept)
Maj Harold G. Walker
Bn-3—
Capt Jacob Joseph
(to 14 Oct)
Capt Victor H. Streit

Eleventh Marines

Commanding Officer—
Col Pedro A. del Valle
(From 9 Oct, BrigGen)
Executive Officer—
LtCol John A. Bemis
(to 17 Oct)
LtCol Robert B. Luckey
(to 28 Nov)
LtCol Thomas B. Hughes
R-1—
1stLt James H. Tatsch
(to 1 Sept)
Marine Gunner Charles E. Stuart
R-2—
1stLt Maurice L. Appleton, Jr.
R-3—
Maj Thomas B. Hughes
(to 28 Nov)
Maj Charles M. Nees
R-4—
Maj James M. Clark

First Battalion, Eleventh Marines

Commanding Officer—
LtCol Joseph R. Knowlan
(to 19 Oct)
LtCol Manley L. Curry
(to 28 Nov)
LtCol Donovan D. Sult
(to 2 Dec)

Executive Officer—
Maj Harry K. Zimmer
Bn-3—
Capt Samuel S. Wooster

Second Battalion, Eleventh Marines

Commanding Officer—
LtCol Edward G. Hagen
(to 14 Sept)
Maj Forest C. Thompson
Executive Officer—
Maj Forest C. Thompson
(to 14 Sept)
Maj Louis A. Ennis
Bn-3—
Capt Louis A. Ennis
(to 14 Sept)
Maj Ernest P. Foley

Third Battalion, Eleventh Marines

Commanding Officer—
LtCol James J. Keating
Executive Officer—
Maj Lewis J. Fields
Bn-3—
Maj George B. Wilson, Jr.

Fourth Battalion, Eleventh Marines

Commanding Officer—
LtCol Melvin E. Fuller
(to 28 Oct)
(from 7 Dec)
Maj Carl G. F. Korn
(28-31 Oct)
Capt Albert H. Potter
(From 1 Nov)
Executive Officer—
Maj Carl G. F. Korn
(to 28 Oct)
Bn-3—
Maj Charles M. Nees
(to 27 Aug)

Fifth Battalion, Eleventh Marines

Commanding Officer—
LtCol E. Hayden Price
(to 18 Oct)
Maj Noah P. Wood, Jr.

Executive Officer—

LtCol Edmund J. Buckley
(to 12 Aug)

Bn-3—

Maj Noah P. Wood, Jr.

First Raider Battalion

Commanding Officer—

Col Merritt A. Edson
(to 21 Sept)

LtCol Samuel B. Griffith II
(22-27 Sept)

Capt Ira J. Irwin

Executive Officer—

LtCol Samuel B. Griffith II

Capt Robert H. Thomas

(From 27 Sept to 19 Nov)

Bn-3—

Maj Robert S. Brown
(to 14 Sept)

First Aviator Engineer Battalion

Commanding Officer—

Maj Thomas F. Riley

Executive Officer—

Maj James M. McQueen

Bn-3—

Capt Douglas P. Devendorf

SECOND MARINE DIVISION

(Rear Echelon remained in New Zealand)

Commanding General—

John Marston

Chief of Staff—

Col Leo D. Hermle
(see also below)

D-1—

LtCol Benjamin W. Atkinson
(Acting Chief of Staff during Hermle's
absence)

D-2—

LtCol William H. Bassett
(In absence of Maj Colley)

D-3—

LtCol David W. Shoup

D-4—

LtCol Arthur D. Challacombe

Forward Echelon, Second Marine Division

Commanding General—

BrigGen Alphonse de Carre

Asst to Commanding General—

Col Leo D. Hermle

Chief of Staff—

Col George F. Stockes

D-1—

Maj Lawrence C. Hays, Jr.

D-2—

Maj Thomas Jack Colley

D-3—

LtCol John H. Coffman
(to 21 Jan 43)

LtCol Jesse S. Cook, Jr.

D-4—

Maj George N. Carroll

Division Special Troops

Commanding Officer—

Col Maurice G. Holmes

Second Amphibian Tractor Battalion

Commanding Officer—

Maj Henry C. Drewes

Executive Officer—

Capt Henry G. Lawrence, Jr.

Second Marines

Commanding Officer—

Col John M. Arthur

Executive Officer—

LtCol William S. Fellers
(to 9 Oct)

LtCol Cornelius P. Van Ness

R-1—

Capt Melvin A. Smith

R-2—

Capt Firman E. Bear, Jr.
(to 9 Sept)

Capt Maxie R. Williams
(to 1 Nov)

Capt Eugene Boardman

R-3—

Maj Cornelius P. Van Ness
(to 9 Oct)

Capt Randall L. Stallings

R-4—

1stLt Eli H. Sobol

First Battalion, Second Marines

Commanding Officer—
LtCol Robert E. Hill
(to 10 Nov)
Maj Wood B. Kyle
Executive Officer—
Maj Wood B. Kyle
(to 10 Nov)
Capt William S. Vasconcellos
Bn-3—
Capt Randall L. Stallings
(to 9 Oct)
Capt Harold S. Thorpe

Second Battalion, Second Marines

Commanding Officer—
Maj Orin K. Pressley
Executive Officer—
Maj Ewart S. Lane
Bn-3—
Capt Howard J. Price
(to 17 Nov)
Captain Bernard W. Schotters

Third Battalion, Second Marines

Commanding Officer—
LtCol Robert G. Hunt
Executive Officer—
Maj John E. Storr
Bn-3—
Capt Thomas W. Huston

Second Service Battalion

Commander of Service Troops—
Col Wm. McN. Marshall
Commanding Officer, 2d Ser. Bn.—
LtCol Clarence H. Baldwin
Executive Officer—
Capt Milton J. Green
Bn-3—
2dLt Stanley W. Robinson

Second Special Weapons Battalion

Commanding Officer—
LtCol Paul D. Sherman
Executive Officer—
Maj Guy E. Tannyhill
Bn-3—
Capt Hulon D. Riche

Second Tank Battalion

Commanding Officer—
Maj Alexander B. Swenceski
Executive Officer—
Maj John F. Schoettel
Bn-3—
2dLt William A. Barry

Sixth Marines

Commanding Officer—
Col Gilder D. Jackson
Executive Officer—
LtCol Alfred A. Watters
(to 15 Dec)
LtCol Lyman Miller
R-1—
Capt Louis N. King
R-2—
Capt William C. Chamberlain
R-3—
Maj Rathvon McC. Tompkins
R-4—
1stLt Cyril C. Sheehan

First Battalion, Sixth Marines

Commanding Officer—
LtCol Russell Lloyd
Executive Officer—
Maj Herbert R. Amey, Jr.
Bn-3—
Capt Loren E. Raffner

Second Battalion, Sixth Marines

Commanding Officer—
Maj Raymond L. Murray
Executive Officer—
Maj Charlton B. Rogers, III
Bn-3—
Capt James J. Coleman

Third Battalion, Sixth Marines

Commanding Officer—
Maj William A. Kengla
Executive Officer—
Maj Kenneth F. McLeod
Bn-3—
Capt James R. Donovan, Jr.

Eighth Marines

Commanding Officer—
Col Richard H. Jeschke
Executive Officer—
LtCol James P. Riseley
R-1—
Capt Homer E. Hire
R-2—
Capt Wilmot J. Spires
R-3—
Maj Dixon J. Goen
R-4—
Maj Cliff Atkinson, Jr.

First Battalion, Eighth Marines

Commanding Officer—
LtCol Miles J. Newton
(to 22 Nov)
Maj Joseph B. McCaffery
Executive Officer—
Maj Joseph B. McCaffery
Capt Percy K. Alford
(from 2 Dec)
Bn-3—
Capt Daniel V. McWethy, Jr.

Second Battalion, Eighth Marines

Commanding Officer—
LtCol John H. Cook, Jr.
Executive Officer—
Maj Hewitt D. Adams
Bn-3—
Capt John E. D. Peacock
(to 23 Nov)
Maj Hewitt D. Adams
(to 1 Dec)
Capt William N. Wilkes, Jr.

Third Battalion, Eighth Marines

Commanding Officer—
LtCol Augustus H. Fricke
Executive Officer—
Maj George D. Rich
Bn-3—
Capt C. J. Chandler, Jr.
(to 15 Dec)
Capt Ralph H. Currin

Tenth Marines

Commanding Officer—
Col Thomas E. Bourke
Executive Officer—
LtCol Ralph E. Forsyth
R-1—
Capt Grant S. Baze
R-2—
Maj George E. Ridgeway
R-3—
Maj Marvin H. Flume
R-4—
Maj Eugene K. Schultz

First Battalion, Tenth Marines

Commanding Officer—
LtCol Presley M. Rixey
Executive Officer—
Maj David L. Henderson
Bn-3—
Capt Charles O. Rogers

Second Battalion, Tenth Marines

Commanding Officer—
Maj George R. E. Shell
Executive Officer—
Maj Howard V. Hiatt
Bn-3—
Capt Richard B. Church

Third Battalion, Tenth Marines

Commanding Officer—
LtCol Manly L. Curry
(To 18 October and from 28 November)
LtCol Donovan D. Sult
(18 Oct-28 Nov)
Executive Officer—
LtCol Donovan D. Sult
Bn-3—
Maj James E. Mills
(to 1 Dec)
Capt Earl J. Rowse

Fourth Battalion, Tenth Marines

Commanding Officer—
Maj Kenneth A. Jorgensen
Executive Officer—
Capt George H. Ford
Bn-3—
Capt George H. Ford

Third Defense Battalion

Commanding Officer—
Col Robert H. Pepper
Executive Officer—
LtCol Harold C. Roberts
Bn-3—
Maj Samuel G. Taxis

Third Barrage Balloon Squadron

Commanding Officer—
Capt Robert C. McDermond

Second Raider Battalion

Commanding Officer—
LtCol Evans F. Carlson
Executive Officer—
Major Ralph H. Coyte
Bn-3—
Capt Merwyn C. Plumley

Ninth Defense Battalion

Commanding Officer—
Col David R. Nimmer
Executive Officer—
LtCol William J. Scheyer
Bn-3—
Capt William C. Givens

Marine Corps Aviation Command

The question of command and staff of the Marine Air components on Guadalcanal is not amenable to orderly tabulation. For purposes of this monograph, it must suffice to say that during his stay on the island, General Geiger operated in something of a dual capacity. He was at once commanding general of the 1st Marine Air Wing, whose actual administrative headquarters remained in Espritu Santo, and Senior Naval Aviator, Guadalcanal. On 3 November, he returned to Espritu Santo, being replaced as Senior Naval Aviator by Brigadier General Louis Woods. General Woods served in that capacity until he, in turn, was relieved by Brigadier General Francis P. Mulcahy on 26 December.

Considerably more confusion obtains in the lower echelons of command, and no attempt can be made here to present a tentative list. It is suggested that the reader refer to the *History of Marine Corps Aviation in World War II*, by Robert Sherrod, wherein the matter is dealt with exhaustively.



THE GUADALCANAL
CAMPAIGN

APPENDIX F

Marine Corps Aces

The following Marine Aviators qualified as aces during their tours of duty on Guadalcanal:

<i>Name</i>	<i>Enemy Planes Shot Down</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Enemy Planes Shot Down</i>
Joseph J. Foss -----	26	Joseph L. Narr -----	7
John L. Smith -----	19	William B. Freeman -----	6
Marion E. Carl -----	16½	Charles L. Kunz -----	6
Robert Galer -----	13	Gilbert Percy -----	6
William P. Marontate -----	13	F. E. Pierce -----	6
Kenneth D. Frazier -----	12½	Z. A. Pond -----	6
Eugene A. Trowbridge -----	12	F. H. Presley -----	6
Harold W. Bauer -----	11	Robert F. Stout -----	6
Thomas H. Mann, Jr. -----	10	Donald K. Yost -----	6
Jack E. Conger -----	9½	F. R. Payne -----	5½
F. K. Loesch -----	8½	L. K. Davis -----	5
J. D. De Blanc -----	8	Cecil J. Doyle -----	5
John F. Dobbin -----	8	F. C. Drury -----	5
Loren D. Everton -----	8	P. J. Fontana -----	5
George L. Hollowell -----	8	Charles Kendrick -----	5
Roger A. Haberman -----	7	W. W. Laird -----	5
Henry B. Hamilton -----	7	Hyde Phillips -----	5

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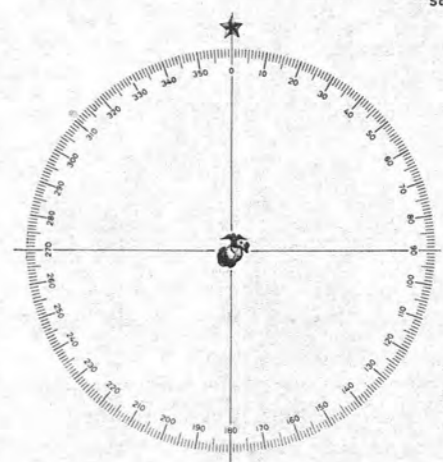
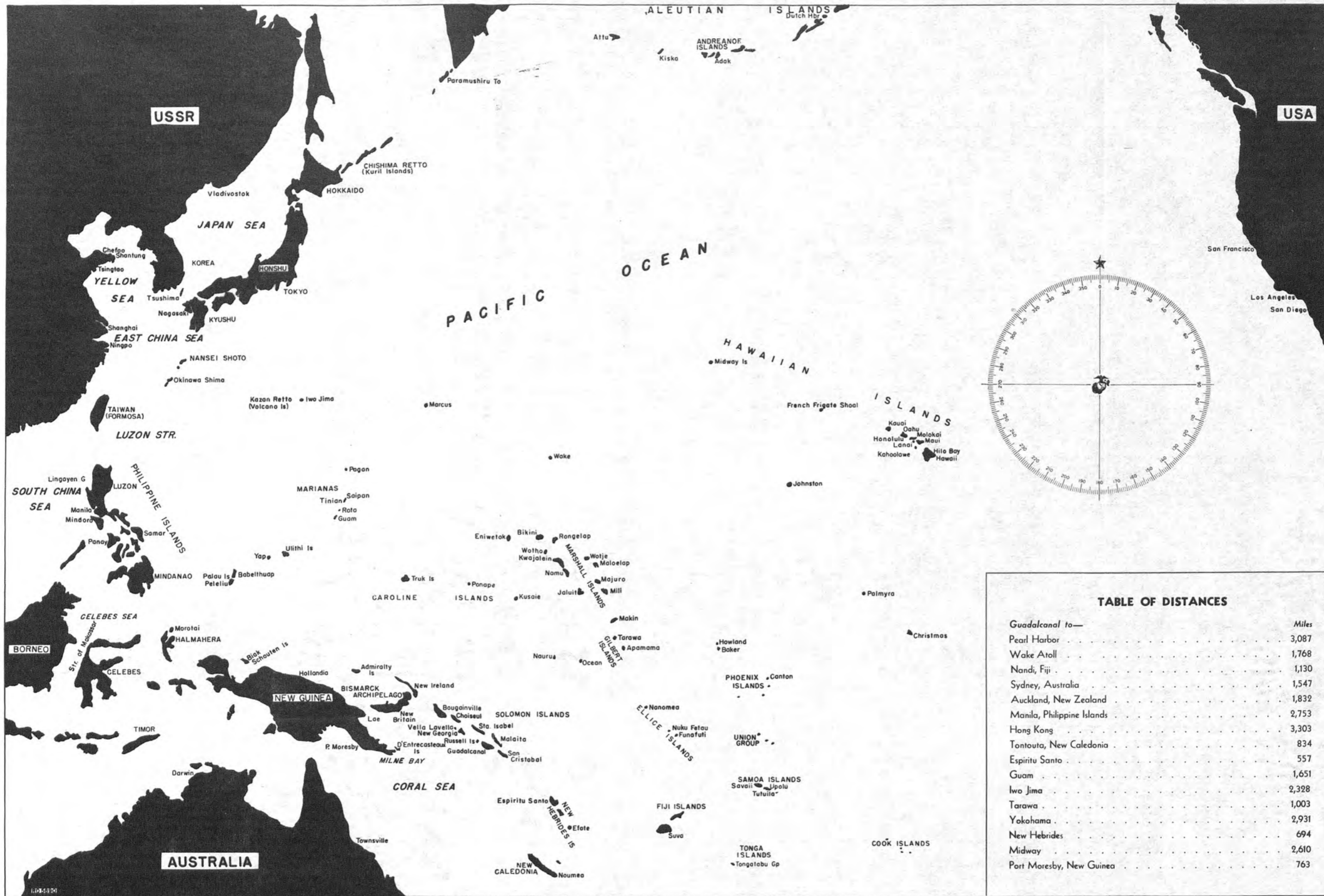


TABLE OF DISTANCES

Guadalcanal to—	Miles
Pearl Harbor	3,087
Wake Atoll	1,768
Nandi, Fiji	1,130
Sydney, Australia	1,547
Auckland, New Zealand	1,832
Manila, Philippine Islands	2,753
Hong Kong	3,303
Tontouta, New Caledonia	834
Espiritu Santo	557
Guam	1,651
Iwo Jima	2,328
Tarawa	1,003
Yokohama	2,931
New Hebrides	694
Midway	2,610
Port Moresby, New Guinea	763

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THE SECRETARY OF THE NAVY

WASHINGTON

4 February 1943.

Cited in the Name of

The President of the United States

THE FIRST MARINE DIVISION, REINFORCED

Under command of

Major General Alexander A. Vandegrift, U.S.M.C.

CITATION:

"The officers and enlisted men of the First Marine Division, Reinforced, on August 7 to 9, 1942, demonstrated outstanding gallantry and determination in successfully executing forced landing assaults against a number of strongly defended Japanese positions on Tulagi, Gavutu, Tanambogo, Florida and Guadalcanal, British Solomon Islands, completely routing all the enemy forces and seizing a most valuable base and airfield within the enemy zone of operations in the South Pacific Ocean. From the above period until 9 December, 1942, this Reinforced Division not only held their important strategic positions despite determined and repeated Japanese naval, air and land attacks, but by a series of offensive operations against strong enemy resistance drove the Japanese from the proximity of the airfield and inflicted great losses on them by land and air attacks. The courage and determination displayed in these operations were of an inspiring order."

Frank Knox
Secretary of the Navy.

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